

The Renaissance of Sikh Devotional Music  
Memory, Identity, Orthopraxy

by  
Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Asian Languages and Cultures)  
in the University of Michigan  
2014

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Arvind-Pal Mandair, Chair  
Emeritus Professor Judith Becker  
Associate Professor Balbinder Bhogal, Hofstra University  
Professor Madhav Deshpande  
Assistant Professor Meilu Ho

Copyright © 2014 Niringan Kaur Khalsa

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Appendices.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Gurbani Kirtan Renaissance .....	2
Ethnographic Research and Approach .....	3
Debating Between Two Revivalist Groups: Reformist and Parampara.....	9
Defining Tradition: Parampara, Maryada, Rahit .....	12
Defining Authenticity, Authority, and Subjectivity .....	15
Gurbani Kirtan: Constructing, Reconstructing, and Deconstructing Sikh Identity .....	16
Integrative Tension: Parampara-Maryada .....	20
Conclusion .....	22
<b>Chapter 1 - Sikh Devotional Music: A Historical Perspective.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>1.1 Indian Soteriology of Music .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>1.2 Sikh Devotional Music .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.3 Sovereign Identity within the Gurus' Bani.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>1.4 Shifting Musical Patronage.....</b>	<b>33</b>
1.4.1 From Temple to Court .....	33
1.4.2 From "Religious" to Political Institutions.....	34
1.4.3 From Private to Public Commercial .....	37
<b>1.5 Contemporary Revival and Reform.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Reforming Sikh Religious Identity.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>2.1 Orientalist Authority .....</b>	<b>47</b>
2.1.1 The "Orientalist Knower" and the "Oriental Known" .....	48
2.1.2 Influential Indology .....	50
<b>2.2 Native Reform .....</b>	<b>54</b>
2.2.1 Singh Sabha: Sikhi(sm) and Moral Monotheism .....	54
<b>2.3 Modern Musicology.....</b>	<b>56</b>
2.3.1 Recovering a Pure Musical Origin.....	56
2.3.2 Musical Reformists: Bhatkhande and Paluskar .....	58
2.3.3 Bhatkhande and Notation .....	59
2.3.4 Paluskar's Religious Revival .....	61

<b>2.4 The Muslim “Other” .....</b>	<b>62</b>
2.4.1 The Expulsion of Muslim Rababi Musicians from the Sikh Musical Sphere .....	65
2.4.2 Authorizing a Normative Sikh Identity .....	72
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Gurbani Kirtan Parampara .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>3.1 Historical Practice of Gurbani Kirtan.....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>3.2 Defining Authenticity and Authority within the Parampara.....</b>	<b>83</b>
3.2.1 Exploring the Validity of Orally Transmitted Knowledge .....	84
3.2.2 The Power and Authority of Memory.....	85
3.2.3 Guru-Shishya Relationship: Questioning Hegemonic Authority .....	87
<b>3.3 Parampara Authority and Authenticity .....</b>	<b>88</b>
3.3.1 Authority of Authentic Experience.....	88
3.3.2 Communicating Between Past and Present.....	90
3.3.3 Gaining Authority from the Orally-Transmitted Parampara Pedagogy .....	92
3.3.4 Challenges to Notions of Authority and Authenticity in the Parampara.....	95
<b>3.4 Parampara Pedagogy: Soteric-Aesthetic Methodology to Embody the Bani Guru.....</b>	<b>99</b>
3.4.1 Building a Soteric-Aesthetic Foundation .....	100
3.4.2 Shabd-Reet(s): Analyzing Spiritual-Musical Symbiosis .....	107
3.4.3 Soteric-Aesthetic Symbiosis and Revelation .....	113
3.4.4 Unraveling the Sikh Notion of “Revelation” .....	116
<b>3.5 Authenticity .....</b>	<b>119</b>
3.5.1 Ancient Compositions Remembered and Sung by Living Books .....	119
3.5.2 Analyzing Authentic Compositions through their Soteric-Aesthetic Symbiosis .....	123
<b>Conclusion: Towards Future Creations .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Gurmat Sangeet: Contemporary Reform of Sikh Musical Memory &amp; Identity .....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>4.1 Institutionalization and Politicization of Gurbani Kirtan .....</b>	<b>134</b>
4.1.1 Sikh Institutions: From Knowledgeable Vidwans to Political Authority of SGPC .....	135
4.1.2 Political Patronage: Employing Ragis at Harimandir Sahib .....	138
4.1.3 The Modern Institutionalization of Gurbani Kirtan Education .....	142
<b>4.2 Contemporary Revival of “Traditional” Gurbani Kirtan.....</b>	<b>149</b>
4.2.1 The Creation of “Gurmat Sangeet”: Institutionalizing an Independent Sikh Musical Identity .....	150
<b>4.3 Orthopraxy.....</b>	<b>156</b>
4.3.1 Reforming and Institutionalizing Sikh Musical Practice.....	156



4.3.2	The Raag Controversy: Standardization and Authentication .....	159
4.3.3	Discordant Pedagogies and Ideologies: The Modernist Search for Authenticity ....	169
	<b>Conclusion: Mediating Oral and Textual Authority .....</b>	<b>175</b>
	<b>Chapter 5 - Debating Orthopraxy, Authority, Authenticity .....</b>	<b>177</b>
	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>177</b>
	<b>5.1 Contesting Ideologies: Questioning the Parampara's Authority to "Change" Gurmat Sangeet .....</b>	<b>182</b>
5.1.1	<i>Nidharat</i> Raag Prescription.....	182
5.1.2	Creatively Connecting Raag and Emotion .....	189
5.1.3	An Affective Prescription? One Raag - One Rasa.....	198
5.1.4	Questioning Shabd-Reet "Additions" to the Bani .....	202
	<b>5.2 Pedagogic Authority .....</b>	<b>211</b>
5.2.1	Questioning Parampara Authority .....	211
	<b>5.3 Reconstruction: Change, Memory, Pedagogy .....</b>	<b>214</b>
5.3.1	Inevitability of Change and Qualified Reconstructions .....	217
5.3.2	Pedagogic Tools to Enhance Memory .....	223
	<b>5.4 Acknowledgement, Patronage, Preservation .....</b>	<b>226</b>
5.4.1	Honoring Memory Bearers: Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards.....	226
5.4.2	Namdhari Community .....	228
	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>234</b>
	<b>Chapter 6 - Looking Towards the Future: Questioning Orthopraxic Boundaries in Gurbani Kirtan.....</b>	<b>240</b>
	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>240</b>
	<b>6.1 (Re)negotiating Orthopraxy in the Presence of the Bani Guru.....</b>	<b>243</b>
6.1.1	Gurbani Kirtan in the Sikh Diaspora .....	251
6.1.2	Technological Mediation.....	255
6.1.3	Technologically Blurring Sacred and Profane.....	258
	<b>6.2 Embodiment .....</b>	<b>261</b>
6.2.1	(Dis)Embodiment: (Dis)integrating the Self .....	261
6.2.2	Embodying the Psychological Environment of Revealed Shabd-Reets .....	262
6.2.3	Market as Patron: Habitus of Listening and Musicking.....	264
6.2.4	Commercializing Kirtan: Entertaining Spirituality or Spiritual Entrainment? .....	266
6.2.5	Classical Gurbani Kirtan .....	270
	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>273</b>
	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>278</b>
	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>321</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Parampara proponants and Revivalists	11
Figure 2: Bhai Avtar Singh on Taus	32
Figure 3: Gurbani Kirtan Taksals in Punjab	35
Figure 4: Performing Gurbani Kirtan on Traditional Instruments	44
Figure 5: Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian	64
Figure 6: Bhai Hari Singh	66
Figure 7: Bhayee Sikandar Singh Bagrian	68
Figure 8: Musical instruments used by ragis and rababis	81
Figure 9: Bhai Gurcharan Singh.	94
Figure 10: Professor Kartar Singh	101
Figure 11: Professor S.K. Saxena.	109
Figure 12: Bhai Balbir Singh.	114
Figure 13: Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi and family	121
Figure 14: Bhai Gurcharan Singh, Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Rattan Singh	127
Figure 15: Bhai Narinder Singh	137
Figure 16: Ragi Duties at Harimandir Sahib	139
Figure 17: Dr. Nivedita Kaur Singh	141
Figure 18: Principal Dyal Singh - Gurmat Vidyala, Rakab Ganj	144
Figure 19: Professor Kartar Singh - Gurmat Sangeet Academy, Anandpur Sahib	146
Figure 20: Sant Sucha Singh - Jawaddi Taksal	160
Figure 21: Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan	164
Figure 22: Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal	168
Figure 23: Raj Academy Website	179
Figure 24: Anad Conservatory Website	180
Figure 25: Gyani Harbhajan Singh, Bhai Baldeep Singh - the art of making the taus	217
Figure 26: Baba Jwala Singh - circa 1935	220
Figure 27: Ustad Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar	222
Figure 28: Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari	229
Figure 29: Ustad Balwant Singh - Bhaini Sahib	231
Figure 30: Nirinjan Khalsa	245
Figure 31: Gurunam Singh	246
Figure 32: Snatam Kaur	247
Figure 33: Bhai Kultar Singh	249
Figure 34: ANHAD	252
Figure 35: Technology Survey	256
Figure 36: Live Gurdwara Broadcast	258
Figure 37: Guru Ganesha Singh	267
Figure 39: Nirvair Kaur	270

## List of Appendices

<b>Appendix I - The Facebook Debate: Discussions Surrounding Gurbani Kirtan Revival and Reform .....</b>	<b>278</b>
Introductory Remarks .....	278
<b>Part I: Debating Gurmat Sangeet and the Gurbani Kirtan Parampara.....</b>	<b>280</b>
<b>Part II: Debating Modern and Traditional Perspectives .....</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>Appendix II - Gurbani Kirtan Shabds .....</b>	<b>303</b>
1) Chapter 3: Parampara, Pg. 110 Ft. nt. 161 .....	303
2) Chapter 3: Parampara, pg 124 ft nt 177 .....	307
3) Chapter 3: Parampara, pg. 126 Ft nt. 178 .....	310
4) Chapter 5: Debating Orthopraxy, pg. 203 Ft nt. 264 .....	312
<b>Appendix III - Interviews and Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>318</b>

## Glossary

- aarti* - Bani by Guru Nanak found in the Guru Granth Sahib.
- abogh* - A term for the concluding fourth part of a dhrupad composition.
- Adi Granth* – “Primal Book” compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, the precursor volume to the Guru Granth Sahib.
- akaar* - Singing an open “aah” sound with a focus on rendering the clarity of the note.
- alaahniah* –Bani from the Guru Granth Sahib recited at the time of death.
- amrit vela* – The ambrosial hours before dawn
- anand karaj* – Sikh marriage ceremony
- antara* - A term for the second part of a dhrupad composition similar in English to the verse.
- asthayi* - A term for the first part of a dhrupad composition equivalent in English to the chorus.
- atman* - The soul-self, or “Atman” – the True Self.
- AUM* - The primal sound of the Veda that is the manifestation of Brahman, or God.
- baaj* – A style of playing Indian percussion.
- Bani* - Hymn or poetic utterance, most often referring to the text of the Guru Granth Sahib
- Bani Guru* – Aka “Shabd Guru” - The spiritual text of the Guru Granth Sahib, considered the living Guru of the Sikhs.
- bazaari* - Music sold in the public marketplace for commercial success.
- bhakti* - Intense loving devotion toward the Divine.
- Brahman* - The concept of God in Hinduism.
- bungas* – Places of learning in Pre-Colonial India.
- chaunki* - Musical sittings or phases of the day. Today Gurbani Kirtan is sung in eight *chaunkis*.
- chitt* - Focused, meditative consciousness, intent.
- darbari* – A musical style referring to the royal courts.
- darbari sangeet* - Music from the royal courts.
- Dasam Granth Sahib* – The collective writings of the 10<sup>th</sup> Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.
- dera* – School of learning under the leadership of a single person, educative or ideological system.
- desi* - “Popular” provincial entertainment music.
- dhadi* - Balladeers that travel from town to town singing music commemorating great events from history.
- dharma* - Spiritually transformative path.
- dhrupad* – An ancient vocal genre of Hindustani and Sikh classical music.
- gana* - Music created and played for entertainment.
- gandharva* - Highly skilled Hindustani classical singing style.
- gharana* - Male hereditary musical lineages with a comprehensive musicological ideology.
- Ghorian* - Bani from the Guru Granth Sahib recited at the time of marriage.

*gian* – Knowledge in its essential form.

*guldastas* - Multi-rhythm and multi-raag compositions.

*Gurbani Kirtan* – Musical rendition of the poetic bani of the Guru Granth Sahib.

*Gurbani Kirtan parampara* – Traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan, a pedagogy that has been orally transmitted from teacher to student.

*Gurdwara* - Sikh Temple.

*GurKhalsa* – Baptized Sikh collective devoted to the Guru.

*Gurmat Sangeet* –Gurbani Kirtan in raag accompanied by stringed instruments based on a modern standard. Literally “music in the Guru’s way.”

*gurmukh* – A person who acts from a place where ego is not the center.

*gurprasad* – An act of grace by the blessing of the Guru.

*Guru Granth Sahib* - The final and enduring Guru of the Sikhs. This volume is considered the living Guru of the Sikh community.

*Guru-panth* - The Sikh collective body or congregation.

*guru-shishya* - The teacher-student relationship in traditional pedagogy.

*gurukula* – A residential school with the disciples living near their guru.

*hazoori ragis* - Resident musicians at the Harimandir Sahib - Golden Temple.

*Japji Sahib* – The seminal prayer of the Sikhs, written by Guru Nanak Dev.

*kama* – Wish, longing, and erotic desire.

*khalifa* – Head of a tradition.

*khayal* - Modern classical Hindustani music genre.

*kirpa* – The grace of God and Guru.

*kirtan* – Devotional singing- chanting.

*kirtaniya, kirtaniya-ragi* – Traditional Sikh devotional musician.

*lakshan geet* - A composition where the raag is described in the lyrics.

*Mahant* - Sikh priestly profession.

*man* – Mind-heart-soul.

*manmukh* - An ego-centric person.

*marga* -“Classical” esoteric music.

*maya* - The illusion of the phenomenal world.

*Miri–Piri* - Political and spiritual sovereignty represented by the two swords worn by Guru Hargobind, the 6<sup>th</sup> Sikh Guru.

*Moksa* – Release from the cycle of birth and death.

*Naad or nada*– Sound in its vibrational and essential form.

*Nada-Brahman* - The Hindu concept of God as sound.

*Nam* - The “Name” of the un-nameable Ultimate Reality.

*Nam Simran* – Meditation on the Nam.

*nidharat* raags – Prescribed raags, identified in the Guru Granth Sahib by each bani's raag heading.

*Nirankaari* – Music devoted to the Divine that is without form.

*Nirgun* - The Divine in a formless, all pervading state - without qualities.

*panth* - The collective congregation of the Sikhs.

*Parampara* - The heritage contained by the succession of teachers and students, an evolving mode of heterogeneous lived operative practices learnt through training and practice. Literally “proceeding from one to another.”

*partaals* - (Often) multi-rhythm compositions.

*pothi* - A sacred book containing spiritual text.

*prakarma* – The walkway around a sacred site for the purpose of circumambulation.

*prana* – The essential energy of life – the breath of life.

*puratan* - Historical, ancient, and of the old ways.

*raag or raga* - A melodic mode in a prescribed formula.

*rabab* – Stringed instrument traditionally played in Gurbani Kirtan.

*rababi* – A rabab player, a Muslim professional Gurbani Kirtan musician.

*ragi and ragi jatha* – A Sikh musician or group of musicians who play Gurbani Kirtan.

*rasa* – The essence, flavor or sentiment of a musical piece.

*rasika* - A knowledgeable listener, an aesthete of Indian classical music.

*sahaj* – A mental and spiritual state of equilibrium that is natural and spontaneous.

*sampuran* – Pure form of a raag.

*sanatan dharma* - Old, traditional practices and beliefs.

*sanchari* - A term for the third part of a dhrupad composition similar in English to the verse but more free flowing.

*sangat* - The congregation of Sikhs who meet religiously as equals, particularly in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib.

*sant-sipahi* – The saint-warrior identity introduced by the 10<sup>th</sup> Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.

*santhya* - The correct pronunciation of sacred texts.

*saranda* - The saranda is a stringed Indian musical instrument that is played with a bow, similar to lutes or fiddles.

*sargam* - Musical scale vocal exercises focusing on pitch and the relationship between notes.

*Sargun* - The Divine in manifested form.

*saroop* – Form or structure.

*seva* - Service for the greater good without regard for self or payment.

*SGPC* – Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the managing body of the Sikhs.

*shabd* - A musico-poetic passage from the Guru Granth Sahib.

*shabd-reet* - Vintage Gurbani Kirtan compositions.

*Sikh Rahit Maryada* - The Sikh Code of Conduct as written by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

*simran* – Meditation on the Ultimate Reality.

*sina-bi-sina* – The teaching or passing on of knowledge directly between a teacher and disciple. Literally “heart-to-heart.”

*Singh Sabha* - A reform movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century to create an independent Sikh religious identity or Sikhism.

*sruti* – The microtonal intervals between notes.

*swar riyaz* - Practice on the notes with a focus to achieve pitch.

*taal* – A rhythmic pattern in Indian music.

*Takht-e Taus* – The peacock throne of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan.

*taksals* - Traditional institutions of learning.

*tanti saaj* - Stringed instruments like rabab, taus, saranda, dilruba.

*taus* - A peacock shaped stringed instrument created by the 6<sup>th</sup> Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib.

*theekas* - An encyclopedia of raags.

*tekhas* - Rhythmic standard that outlines and defines the taal, played on percussive instruments.

*Udasi* - A religious, ascetic, sadhu focused on the teachings of its founder, Sri Chand, the son of Guru Nanak.

*vedic* - Relating to the early Sanskrit Vedas.

*vidwan* - Master teacher who has gained knowledge and experience through dedicated discipline, a highly specialized and honored knowledge bearer.

*vidya* – Knowledge.

*vir rasa* - Heroic aesthetic.

## Introduction

This dissertation is an ethnographic examination of the contemporary revival of traditional modes of Sikh devotional music, *Gurbani Kirtan*<sup>1</sup> including its performative, pedagogical and soteriological sphere. This musical genre was approaching extinction in the 20<sup>th</sup>- 21<sup>st</sup> century with only a few remaining memory-bearers dying in anonymity without having transmitted their musical knowledge to the next generation. The traditional forms of Gurbani Kirtan had been safeguarded through the Guru Era<sup>2</sup> (1469-1708) as part of the Gurus' "intangible" heritage, even through Post-Guru Era struggles with the Mughal Empire for Sikh sovereignty. However the British Colonial era brought great change to the Sikh devotional sphere where the patronage of traditional Gurbani Kirtan shifted from knowledgeable supporters who valued the classicism of the genre, to political institutions of the modern era. Additionally the advent of media technology through the radio and film industries affected musical preferences of the new public as patron. Particularly India's 1947 independence removed the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Gurbani Kirtan* refers to the singing, instrumental accompaniment and performance of the Guru's bani although it encapsulates a whole sphere of practice that can be referred to as *Gurbani Sangeet*, which includes: instruments- their making and playing techniques; the repertoire- its analysis and rendering techniques; singing styles- including raag structures, ornamentations, and aesthetic qualities; pedagogy – its methodologies and techniques; as well as imbibing the soteriological tools to discard the ego-vices for a transformative subjectivity.

<sup>2</sup> There were ten consecutive Sikh Gurus (1469-1708) who were the spiritual leaders of the Sikhs. The first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469. At the age of 30 he had his revelatory experience of the Unitary nature of Reality that he expressed in Japji (found on the first pages of the Sikh Scripture as Guru - Guru Granth Sahib). Those who became students or learners of Guru Nanak's path were known as Sikhs (lit. learners). The line of Sikh Gurus continued until the Tenth Guru, before his passing in 1708, instilled the authority of the Guruship in the Guru's Bani (hymns) enshrined in the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, which remains the everlasting Guru of the Sikhs to this day.



knowledgeable Muslim *rababi* musicians from the Sikh musical sphere as Sikhs attempted to define their own independent national “religious” identity.

Socio-political changes during the modern era greatly affected the preservation of traditional Gurbani Kirtan. Due to the significant loss, a new generation of Sikh musicians took it upon themselves to preserve and thus revive traditional Gurbani Kirtan practice that had only been remembered and preserved by a few. Today there remain only a handful of those trained in the Gurbani Kirtan *parampara* (tradition) who remember how Gurbani Kirtan was sung prior to the Colonial Era (1858-1947) and how vintage Gurbani Kirtan compositions (*shabd-reeets*), which are said to be extant since the Guru Era (1469-1708), have been orally transmitted.

### **Gurbani Kirtan Renaissance**

What I refer to as the “renaissance” began taking shape in the 1990s with a renewed interest in traditional forms of Gurbani Kirtan.<sup>3</sup> It was spurred by the recognition that many of the elders born at the turn of the century were beginning to die, taking with them their “intangible” knowledge of historical Gurbani Kirtan praxis. At this time, a few notable Sikh *kirtaniya-ragis* (traditional devotional musicians) emerged to “revive”<sup>4</sup> the memory of a Sikh musical past which they link to the temporal and spiritual authority of the Sikh Gurus. Today, through the efforts of these *revivalists*, traditional styles can be heard once again through media technologies, performed in local *Gurdwaras* (temples), and promoted as the musical standard within the *Harimandir Sahib*

---

<sup>3</sup> In particular the renaissance of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara was spurred by the inquiries and research conducted by Bhai Baldeep Singh, a 13th generation memory-bearer of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara who, through learning from his grand-uncles Bhai Avtar (1925-2006) and Bhai Gurcharan Singh (b. 1914, now 99 yrs), as well as their elder classmate Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar (1900-1995), gave him glimpses into what knowledge had been remembered and orally transmitted as well as how much has been lost, even within the 25 year gap between elder Bhai Arjan Singh Taranger and younger Bhai Avtar Singh.

<sup>4</sup> I have been cautioned against using the term “revival” or “revivalist” by Gurbani Kirtan exponents Bhai Baldeep Singh and Bhai Kultar Singh as well as by Raja Mrigendra Singh of Patiala who note that someone cannot “revive” that which is not dead, indicating that there are still people who remember and practice the extant Gurbani Kirtan parampara. Though heeding their advice, I use the Oxford Dictionary definition of the term “revival” to mean “an instance of something becoming popular, active, or important again; an improvement in the condition, strength, or fortunes of someone or something” while “revivalist” is defined as “a tendency or desire to revive a former custom or practice.” <oxforddictionaries.com>

(Golden Temple of Amritsar).<sup>5</sup> Gurbani Kirtan, in its traditional forms, has also become popularized within the Sikh and Indian musical communities. Recently it has been promoted as an independent musical genre or *Gurmat Sangeet* (Music in the Guru's way) through its institutionalization as an academic discipline within universities and *vidyalas* (learning centers) who train next-generation *ragis* (Sikh professional musicians).

### **Ethnographic Research and Approach**

Prior to the 1990s the majority of Sikhs were not aware of the losses incurred to the Sikh devotional sphere even though Gurbani Kirtan had remained a continuous part of the Sikh sonic and devotional environment. Even though I grew up in a Sikh household, as a second-generation Anglo-American Sikh, it was not until 1997 that I encountered traditional Gurbani Kirtan sung in raag-based melodies accompanied by *tanti saaj* (stringed instruments) and the *jori-pakhawaj* (percussion).<sup>6</sup> It was at this time that I began to question why I had only heard Gurbani Kirtan sung in more simplified tunes to the accompaniment of harmonium and tabla. Why was the traditional style of Gurbani Kirtan no longer sung in Sikh Gurdwaras, including the central Sikh Temple the *Harimandir Sahib* (Golden Temple of Amritsar), hailed as upholding the Sikh spiritual-musical standard? Why were the Muslim rababis, the initial Gurbani Kirtan exponents and teachers, removed from the Sikh devotional sphere? How could the Sikh *sangat* community lose such a rich spiritual-musical heritage, especially since Gurbani Kirtan is an integral part of Sikh devotional practice? How did contemporary Sikh musical practice change so drastically in

---

<sup>5</sup> Historically the Harimandir Sahib served as the standard bearer of musical excellence and authority. However, the late colonial era and 1947 partition of Punjab brought much change to musical patronage and education. It has been only recently, in 2006, that traditional musicalities again began to be promoted at the Harimandir Sahib by employing stringed instruments to accompany the ragis and by promoting singing in raag. Still, many musicians whom I spoke to insist that there is greater effort needed to revive the standard of musical proficiency and spiritual aesthetics of the pre-partition era, as will be discussed throughout.

<sup>6</sup> The jori is remembered as being made by the 5th Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan, who modified the two-headed pakhawaj barrel drum by cutting it in half into two drums that stand upright. Both drums are played with the same hand strokes and used in traditional Gurbani Kirtan. I first met Bhai Baldeep Singh in 1997 and began serious study of the jori-pakhawaj in 2000, becoming the first female exponent of the Amritsaari-Kapurthala baaj Sikh percussive tradition.

the last 50-100 years? Along with the flood of questions, I continued to have a nagging self-reflexive thought about what it all meant for my own Sikh identity. Was being a Sikh defined solely by the codes of conduct that I had grown up with or was it something more experiential and “intangible,” that resisted such codification?

These questions developed into serious inquiries informed by the insight into the history, philosophy, ideology and practice of Gurbani Kirtan that I gained from undergoing the parampara pedagogy, and the graduate education I received at the University of Michigan. Thus sparked my dissertation research into the contemporary revival or renaissance of the multi-faceted aspects of traditional Sikh devotional music, Gurbani Kirtan.

As the first of its kind, my ethnographic research explores the diverse positions held by Sikh revivalist musicians regarding the history, practice, and ideology of Gurbani Kirtan within the Sikh panth. What impact does the multiplicity of voices have on both the representations and performances of Gurbani Kirtan today? How do these perspectives relate to identity formation with regards to the contemporary renaissance or revival of Gurbani Kirtan? Those partaking in this renaissance (of which my research is an active part) are various groups of musicians, students, listeners, and youth both within India and the Diaspora whose discourse and performative practices are informed by their ideology and pedagogy.

I have conducted extensive fieldwork through interviewing extant memory-bearers, scholars, revivalists, teachers and student. I have engaged in participant observation - attending and participating in Gurbani Kirtan classes, workshops, and concerts at Gurdwaras, institutions of learning, and private homes.<sup>7</sup> I have traveled throughout the Punjab (including Delhi) for month-long trips (April 2007,<sup>8</sup> May 2009, Feb 2012), a year as a Fulbright Fellow (2010-2011),<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix: Interviews for a list of those whom I have interviewed.

<sup>8</sup> This trip was a preliminary research trip to search out extant works on Gurbani Kirtan and begin to create relationships with interlocutors before entering the Ph.D program at University of Michigan.

<sup>9</sup> My Fulbright was conducted through a host affiliation with Dr. Gurnam Singh at the Gurmat Sangeet Department at Punjabi University, Patiala.

and two weeks in the UK (March 2012), interviewing, discussing, and learning from various Sikh musicians and scholars including those remaining memory-bearers of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara. I have also interviewed traditional as well as contemporary innovative Gurbani Kirtan musicians throughout the United States (2007-present).<sup>10</sup> Having myself undergone the parampara's oral *guru-shishya* (teacher-student) pedagogy, learning the classical percussive and musical repertoire of the parampara for the past fourteen years, has enabled me to gain direct access to the extant memory-bearers as well as others involved within the renaissance.

I initially embarked on this research due to the dearth of scholarship within the field of Sikh Studies on Gurbani Kirtan in general, and particularly on the contemporary revival of its traditional musicalities. However, the process of revival is one that is evolving and continually taking place *now*. Through years of research, education, performance, and practice I have witnessed the effects of the renaissance through the increasing number of conversations and debates regarding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy, whether online (chat-forums, YouTube, Facebook), at homes, in Gurdwaras, in interviews, in kirtan courses, and in personal interactions. There continue to be an increasing number of works contributing to the renaissance including: journal volumes, articles, book chapters, conference panels, online courses, dissertations,

---

<sup>10</sup> See Concluding Chapter for a discussion on Sikh diasporic musicians such as ANHAD who sing Gurbani Kirtan to rock tunes as well as *3HO Kirtan* musicians from *3HO/Sikh Dharma* (3HO-Healthy Happy Holy Organization and Sikh Dharma International) which consists of both Kundalini Yoga and Sikh practitioners hailing from diverse socio-cultural-religious backgrounds. The term '3HO' encapsulates members of the Kundalini Yoga "Healthy Happy Holy" community as established by Yogi Bhajan (aka Siri Singh Sahib) in 1969. There is a diversity of 3HO members who practice Kundalini although some may not prescribe to the Sikh identity. Nevertheless, their Kundalini Yoga practices are replete with Sikh mantras, ideologies, and lifestyle (dharmic) practices as taught by Yogi Bhajan, who himself was a Sikh.

*3HO Kirtan* includes the singing of traditional Gurbani Kirtan as well as yogic mantras and devotional poetry sung in a variety of musical styles including Indian classical and semi classical, new-age, world, electronic, soul, hip hop, folk, rock, and funk. 3HO Kirtan lyrics include Sikh hymns in the Gurbani language with translations also sung in the mother tongue of the local 3HO communities. 3HO Kirtan includes cultural, linguistic, ideological and expressive practices from various religious (Judeo-Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu) and cultural (North and South American, European, African, and pan-Asian) backgrounds.

workshops, and even the establishment of a Chair in Sikh Musicology in the US at Hofstra University in 2011.<sup>11</sup> The reality of being an active participant within the revival has caused me to be aware that the very processes of my own dialogues, inquiries, and interviews have framed some of the conversation and debates within the revival, thus becoming a part of and shaping the revival itself.<sup>12</sup>

The time-sensitive reality of engaging with a near-forgotten oral tradition has remained an overwhelming reminder in my work. I continue to receive news of those who have passed on, either before I had the chance to interview them or before I was able to re-visit them and further our discussions.<sup>13</sup> By dialoguing with the past, I hope to encourage a conversation in the present

---

<sup>11</sup> As a prominent example of the renaissance, Sikh Formations has dedicated two-volumes Volumes 7 (2011) & 8 (2012) to Gurbani Kirtan as the product of a three-day conference “Hermeneutics of Sikh Music (rag) and Word (shabad)” organized at Hofstra University, Long Island, NY (May 21-23 2010). (I published an article in vol. 8 entitled “Gurbani Kirtan Renaissance: Reviving Musical Memory, Reforming Sikh Identity”). In an effort to promote dialogue amongst scholars and practitioners of Gurbani Kirtan, Hofstra University invited notable revivalist-musicians Bhai Baldeep Singh, Gurnam Singh, and Prof. Surinder Singh, though Bhai Baldeep Singh was the only one in attendance. In 2009, prior to this conference, Hofstra University’s Sikh Studies Chair Balbinder Singh Bhogal invited noted proponents of traditional Gurbani Kirtan, including Gurnam Singh (Head and Chair of Gurmat Sangeet Department, Punjabi University, Patiala) and Bhai Baldeep Singh, to hold courses and give concerts on “Sikh music and Word.” In this way Hofstra University has been an integral component in the Diasporic renaissance bringing traditional Gurbani Kirtan into the American university system, which in 2011 culminated in the establishment of the *Sardarni Harbans Kaur Chair in Sikh Musicology*, the first in the diaspora held by Francesca Cassio. Bhogal explains the reasoning behind Hofstra’s role in promoting discussion, events, and courses on Gurbani Kirtan. “Regarding the courses and concerts organized, the S.K.K. Bindra Chair of Sikh Studies provided an environment within which all participants in this relatively new field of Sikh Studies (religious and musical), even given the contested histories of the musical heritage of the Gurus, were able to come to the table to begin a scholarly and mutually beneficial conversation to revive interest in a rich musical tradition that is perceived by some to be in crisis and near extinction.” (Bhogal 2011, 211)

<sup>12</sup> In “The Ethnomusicologist, Ethnographic Method, and the Transmission of Tradition” (from *Shadows in the Field* 2008) Kay Shelemay recognizes the ethics of doing fieldwork on a musical tradition where the ethnomusicologist may in turn affect how a tradition is perceived through their own interactions and mediations. In particular, my education at the University of Michigan has illustrated distinct issues with notions of continuity within traditions, the power-knowledge dichotomy of oral pedagogy, and the modern re-invention of traditions, all of which I have brought into my inquiries, thus shaping discussions within the field.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix: Interviews for an acknowledgement of those whom I had the opportunity to work with as well as those who passed before such an opportunity presented itself.

that serves to co-create the future of Sikh devotional music practice and its study.

### **Revival Apparatuses**

The revival process has raised questions related to musical authenticity and authority between various revivalist groups as well as within Sikh Studies. Differing opinions related to Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy, raag structures, and instrumentation have caused scholars, like Bob van der Linden, to question whether or not the revivalist claims to recover “music in the Guru’s way” can be authenticated. As an orally transferred tradition Gurbani Kirtan only began to be documented in the written form through the colonial encounter. He writes,

The notion of ‘authentic’ music...remains an imperial stereotype used by reformist Sikhs to legitimate the modernity of their tradition...and has been concerned with representations (identity politics) and appropriations (western staff notation, the harmonium, recording industry etc.) and never has been ‘authentic’.<sup>14</sup> (2008, 12)

Van der Linden later explains: “In relation to the quest for the authentic performance of kirtan, the main question that remains is, of course, to what level the music of an oral tradition of which there are almost no written sources available can be recreated over time.” (van der Linden 2011, 389)

In response to van der Linden’s claims, I will look at the over-arching themes of authority, authenticity, and subjectivity in relation to institutionalization, tradition, orality, and memory to argue that the contemporary renaissance cannot be viewed as a cohesive narrative of loss and recovery of an authentic music linked to the authority of the Gurus nor as being

---

<sup>14</sup> The topic of authenticity and authority within Gurbani Kirtan has generated a fascinating discussion between van der Linden and Bhai Baldeep Singh in their articles published in the previous *Sikh Formations* Volume 7. Both articles appear to be responding to each others’ papers which were given at the ‘Hermeneutics of Sikh Music (rag) and Word (shabad)’ conference held at Hofstra University, NY (May 2010).

inextricably enmeshed in the Imperial encounter. In doing so, I will elucidate how the apparatuses at work within the contemporary renaissance are more nuanced than the homogenizing tendency to lump together all revival efforts into one “Gurmat Sangeet” movement that attempts to recreate past music in the image of the present. (van der Linden 389)

In this way, I will illustrate how the revivalist effort contains reformist tendencies that are ensnared within a modernist epistemological web of identity politics, institutionalization, and notions of authenticity, while complicating totalizing claims that altogether erase the heterogeneity inherent in the revival, in the Gurbani Kirtan genre, and within Sikh identity itself.

To illustrate that the Sikh musical renaissance is much more complex than can be subsumed under one unitary narrative, it is useful to adopt Balbinder Singh Bhogal’s concept of “integrative tension” which offers us a way to negotiate between the opposing binaries of “eternal capture” of tradition and the “abrupt invention/fabrication” of tradition in the modern era. (2011, 229) In this mode, the contemporary revival can be viewed as a complex and nuanced scene where each individual revivalist has taken diverse methodological approaches underpinned by their particular ideological frameworks. Their ideology is informed by their pedagogic background and in turn informs the discursive and performative ways in which Gurbani Kirtan is represented. In other words, each player has had to negotiate between the multiple historical and ideological layers at work with regards to authenticity, authority, and subjectivity.

By using these provisional frameworks I hope to elucidate not only the *integrative tensions* at work within the contemporary renaissance, but within Gurbani Kirtan itself. To carry out this aim, I will illustrate how there are reformist tendencies within the revival that attempt to reconstruct past memories and practices “in the image of the present” (van der Linden 2011, 389) for the modern agenda of institutionalizing a continuous “narrative of identity.” (Anderson 1991,

205) Thus my research suggests that aspects of the renaissance of traditional Gurbani Kirtan are ensnared in reformist apparatuses that can be seen as a 21<sup>st</sup> century re-presentation of the modernizing project and reformist agendas of 19<sup>th</sup> century India, to promote an independent Sikh (musical) identity.

### **Debating Between Two Revivalist Groups: Reformist and Parampara**

In the last few years there have been lively ongoing debates between Gurbani Kirtan musicians who are interested in reviving its traditional forms of performative practice.<sup>15</sup> In an effort to organize the main voices in this debate, I have chosen provisional labels to classify the musicians whose pedagogy informs their discourse and performative practice.<sup>16</sup> Although the terms I have chosen to designate these groups carry historical and theoretical baggage and therefore can have the negative effect of minimizing the complexity of the scene, I will use them as an attempt to identify the actors and frame the discursive ideologies within the contemporary renaissance of Gurbani Kirtan. In doing so, I organize the revivalists, into two groups *reformist* and *parampara*.<sup>17</sup> While both are engaged in the contemporary renaissance, their perspectives, discursive ideologies, modes of practice, and musical-aesthetic senses differ significantly.

---

<sup>15</sup> I use the term “performative” in reference to the diverse acts of ritual performance as analyzed by anthropologists Tambiah (1996) and Bell (1997).

<sup>16</sup> Currently the categories are useful framing tools, but they have the adverse effect of minimizing the complexity of the scene. I do agree with William Noll’s perspective in “Selecting Partners: Questions of Personal Choice and Problems of History in Fieldwork and Its Interpretation” (from *Shadows in the Field*) that categories such as “tradition” or “change” are altogether not useful as they are “reductive abstractions.” However I choose to use such terms for paradigmatic accessibility, and take into consideration his point that “music aesthetic, performance practice, and expectation” are “better described within the context of many social institutions that were developed by specific people under specific circumstances for specific reasons.” (177)

<sup>17</sup> The two groups of revivalists - reformist and parampara - can be contrasted with *modernists* who make up the majority of Sikh practitioners. Their musical aesthetics are derived from modern media technology, instrumentation, and contemporary congregational singing. This category contains Sikh practitioners as well as both popular and lay musicians whose interests do not lie in reviving older forms of Gurbani Kirtan, but whose voices are heard responding to revivalist discourse. While “modernists” are not the primary focus of this dissertation, the differing discursive ideologies can be seen through the Facebook Debate between Bhai Baldeep Singh and Manbir Singh found in the Appendix.



I use the term *reformist* to reference the late 19th- early 20th century Indian national reformists and implies those musicians whose goal it is to re-classicize and institutionalize Gurbani Kirtan as an independent genre (*Gurmat Sangeet*) through orthopraxic prescriptions such a singing in *nidharat* raags (singing shabds in the raags “prescribed” by the raag heading of Guru Granth Sahib) as well as in the raag structures standardized by the *Raga Nirnayak Committee*.<sup>18</sup> Although the intention has been to revive a lost classicism in Gurbani Kirtan, the creation of a normatively defined Sikh musical identity has had the negative consequence of removing the inherent diversity from the genre. Their training and resulting reformist perspective is informed by one or more of the following: musical institutions, the Hindustani classical music traditions, the literal interpretation of the Guru Granth Sahib, and/or their own personal preferences and experiences.

I use *parampara* on the other hand, to designate those revivalists whose musical education stems from the memory of the Sikh’s centuries old Gurbani Kirtan pedagogic process and operative practices. They claim to remember vintage shabd-reefs from the times of the Gurus. They authenticate these compositions by analyzing their symbiosis between *raag* (melodic structure), *taal* (rhythm), *bani/shabd* (musico-poetic word), and *avadhana/chitt/surt* (intent-ness). These “four pillars” are perceived as upholding Gurbani’s *soteric-aesthetic*<sup>19</sup> nature accompanied by traditional stringed instruments whose low timbre evokes meditative contemplation.<sup>20</sup> Thus parampara revivalists are informed by the extant memory, operative practices, and oral pedagogy transmitted over centuries by the Guru Panth as well as the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib. In this way, parampara musicians are informed by the

---

<sup>18</sup> The Raga Nirnayak Committee was established in 1990-1991 by Sant Sucha Singh of Jawaddi Taksal, Ludhiana. He gathered notable ragis together, in an effort to standardize “Sikh” raag structures. (Discussed in Chapter 4).

<sup>19</sup> *Soteric-aesthetic* implies the soteriological focus and aim of Gurbani Kirtan expressed through emotionally appropriate musicality, not based in the ego but instead in a mode of intent-lessness.

<sup>20</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh first developed this concept. See Bhai Baldeep Singh “What is Kirtan” 2011 (248-251) as well as his power-point presentation “Musical Instruments used in Gurbani Kirtan and Bhakti Tradition” (2006) for a complete discussion on this topic.

heterogeneity of past operative practices that resist reformist standardization and institutionalization.

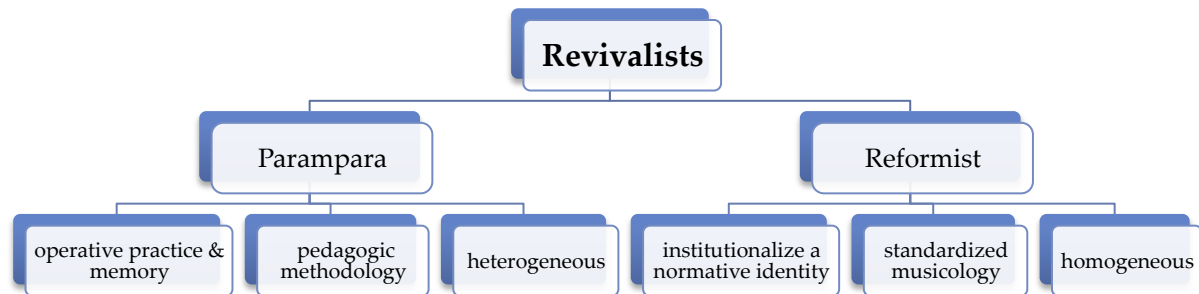


Figure 1: Revivalists of Gurbani Kirtan traditions can be recognized as two separate initiatives; those who enliven the parampara tradition, and those who espouse a reformist approach.

Thus the contemporary Gurbani Kirtan renaissance is not exempt from the tension created between *normative* ideology and *operative* practices.<sup>21</sup> The revivalist-cum-reformist attempt to preserve Gurbani Kirtan by establishing an independent Sikh musical identity through standardized raag structures and orthopraxic prescriptions has had the negative consequence of erasing the memory of operative practices passed down orally through the Gurbani Kirtan parampara since the time of the Sikh Gurus. Therefore the contemporary Gurmat Sangeet narrative that promotes a normative Sikh musical identity becomes complicated when also taking the Gurbani Kirtan parampara as an equally authoritative source because it resists such homogenized definitions. Thus to frame the arguments, I analyze the rhetoric of each voice in the debate based on each individual's pedagogy which informs their own discursive ideology

<sup>21</sup> I use Clarence McMullen's definition of the terms *normative* and *operative* where "normative beliefs and practices are those which are officially stated and prescribed or proscribed by a recognized religious authority, which can be a person, organization or an official statement. Operative beliefs and practices, on the other hand, are those actually held by the people." Thus I argue that reformists work to institutionalize a *normative* mode of Gurmat Sangeet that forgets the inherent diversity in the historically *operative* practices of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara. (McMullen 1989, 5; quoted in Myrvold 2007, 12)

including notions of musical authenticity and authority which in turn defines Sikh musical orthopraxy and identity.

### **Defining Tradition: Parampara, Maryada, Rahit**

The word “tradition” can come with negative connotations linked to hegemonic notions of authority and sacred origins. It has been argued that notions of tradition deny ruptures in time and instead assume the replication of a sacred origin. Can transmission of tradition over time instead allow for an openness to future possibilities rather than merely being a repetition of the “same”? Rather than representing or imposing a homogenous external authority, can tradition instead be viewed as alive and dynamic - enabling one’s own experience and expression to be authoritative? Tradition in this mode would be a productive one, enabling a continuous dialogue between the present and the past, blurring the boundaries between self and other.

Because there are multiple definitions ensnared within the heavy laden term “tradition(al)”, it becomes useful to employ indigenous terminology to clarify concepts and understand their underlying epistemological frameworks. *Tradition* comes from the Latin roots *trans* “across” and *dare* “to give” and is defined as “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way.” (OxfordDictionary.com) It is also defined within an aural-oral episteme,<sup>22</sup> as the act of orally transmitting an artistic style or methodology over generations,<sup>23</sup> and can also be understood in the theological sense as an ideology of religious authority based on a divine origin.<sup>24</sup>

Poststructuralists negatively refer to the institutionalized mode of transmission of an authoritative origin as a repetition and return of the “same”. (Bruns 298) However, this limited

---

<sup>22</sup> The transmission of tradition can be by “word of mouth or by example ...without written instruction.” (Merriam-Webster.com)

<sup>23</sup> Tradition can be understood as “an artistic or literary method or style established by an artist, writer, or movement, and subsequently followed by others.” (OxfordDictionary.com)

<sup>24</sup> Tradition can be defined as “a doctrine believed to have divine authority though not in the scriptures, in particular.” (OxfordDictionary.com)

definition either assumes *tradition* is an attempt to recapture a past sacred and pure origin in the present or an attempt to re-present the past into a normative present for the modern agenda of codification and institutionalization. These definitions link tradition with notions of authenticity and authority, based on an aural-oral episteme whose limited face-to-face mode of knowledge transmission becomes denigrated in the modern episteme that promotes democratic accessibility through the visual-written form.

While the same word “tradition” can carry varying forms of meaning, it becomes helpful to employ the native Sikh concepts of *parampara*, *maryada* and *rahit* to better understand the role of tradition within Gurbani Kirtan. *Parampara* literally means “proceeding from one to another,” connoting the passing on of a practice from a teacher to student. It implies an evolving mode of heterogeneous lived operative practices that allow for openness to difference and future possibilities.<sup>25</sup> The normative mode of tradition or to use the Punjabi term, *maryada* (ex Rahit Maryada) can be used to connote a normative mode of tradition, which is a homogeneous representation of lived practice combined with newly established conventions institutionalized into a normative model with the goal of exact replication and adherence.<sup>26</sup> When appropriated for reasons of identification and replication, *parampara* becomes enclosed within a normative definition of tradition or *maryada*, further defined in Bhai Khan Singh Nabha’s *Shabd Kosh* as “custom, tradition, convention, and boundary (*seema*).”<sup>27</sup> *Maryada* and *parampara* both connote changeable traditions where a *maryada* custom may become a convention dependent on the epistemological needs of the time or transmitted as a *parampara* practice over time.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Parampara* lends itself to the “structural patterns” through which *maryada* is manifested. *Parampara* “involves skills and their perceptive use, being heterogeneous it has varied emphases and evolves in course of time. It is a mode of expression and celebration, learnt through training and practice.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2000)

<sup>26</sup> *Maryada* has “to do with concepts, consists of purpose(s), values and beliefs that provide validating/authenticating criteria. It sets the bounds, gives direction and is homogeneous.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2000)

<sup>27</sup> shabdkosh.com

In contrast *rahit* is defined as an unchanging tradition, such as the Gurus' bani. Today there is much debate within the renaissance as to whether the raag heading (under which each bani appears in the Guru Granth Sahib) is a prescriptive indication or *rahit* of how Gurbani Kirtan should be sung. However, the Guru Granth Sahib does not give the melodic forms of the raags, which may be sung in different ways based on particular *maryada* conventions or a variety of *parampara* practices. Thus while singing Gurbani in raag can be viewed as a *rahit*, there has always been a parallel stream of oral transmission and operative practice that even pre-dates the compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib (1604) with Gurbani sung in various raags, not only as indicated by the raag heading, and even in raags not found in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Sikh Gurbani Kirtan *rahit* can be understood as being informed by the musical and soteriological information found within the Guru Granth Sahib as well as lived operative practices. Noteworthy then, the authenticity and authority of knowledge transmitted by a parampara is dependent on whether it is based on a *rahit*, and where that *rahit*'s authority is invested.<sup>28</sup> In order for a parampara to evolve it needs to continually assess what aspects are modern creations, what aspects are normative conventions, and what aspects are indelible to its foundation.

It becomes problematic when, in an effort to create a homogenous musical identity with clearly defined boundaries, *maryada* conventions erase the diversity of practices within a *parampara*. To differentiate between these modes of tradition it becomes essential to further define their ideological frameworks and methodological approaches underpinned by differing notions of authenticity and authority, which in turn affect subjectivity.

---

<sup>28</sup> "Parampara can both, evolve and devolve... For any regeneration, the Rahit must be evoked, the links to any remaining established traditions (parampara) must be established to diligently imbibe oral narratives and memories... Newer attempts are made by knowledgeable people and must be thus remembered and not mixed with the 'original' practices." (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication Feb 3, 2013.)

## Defining Authenticity, Authority, and Subjectivity

*Authenticity* can be defined as that which is “emotionally appropriate, significant, purposive and responsible.” (OxfordDictionary.com) The authenticity of a particular methodology being used within Gurbani Kirtan can therefore be assessed based on whether it utilizes a musicality that is i) “emotionally appropriate“ (*raag* melody, *rasa* emotive aesthetic, instrumentation) to convey the ii) “significance” (meaning of the *shabd-bani*) with a iii) spiritually “purposive” intent in a way that iv) “responsibly” maintains the bani’s soteriological nature by adhering to a particular methodology of operative practice which supports the aforementioned criteria.

Whether these notions of authenticity are being upheld is determined by an *authority* defined as: i) “a person with extensive or specialized knowledge about a subject; an expert” connoting masterful kirtaniya-ragi or rababi musicians, the Sikh Gurus, or other *vidwans* (knowledgeable ones); ii) “a book or other source able to supply reliable information or evidence” which in modernist Sikh terms denotes written documentation such as the Guru Granth Sahib (Scripture as Guru), musical notation, or scholarly works. It can also refer to the normatively accepted authoritative sources which contain “information or evidence” such as the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (code of conduct) and court rulings (Gurdwara Act of 1925).<sup>29</sup> These evidentiary sources are deemed *authoritative* by iii) “a person or organization having political or administrative power and control” such as the Sikh governing body, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), or any other private or publically funded institution such as a University.

Differing notions of authority can thus be identified based on whether they advocate hegemonic rule or make a claim to knowledge. Bruns (1992) defines *authority of rule* as that which coerces through power and force, thus being the authority gained from institutions that create standardized notions. (211) This mode of authority harkens to the notion of *maryada* in

---

<sup>29</sup> Quoted definitions from OxfordDictionary.com

that it produces religious identity over time, often predicated on the authorial “Truth” of the Book or religious Scripture. (Gifford 2005) On the other hand, Bruns states that *authority of claim* “is not imperialist. It cannot be institutionalized, that is, it is not a claim whose power lies in its self-justification...this claim demands not obedience but openness, acknowledgement, and acceptance of what is singular and otherwise.” (Bruns 211-12) From this latter *authority of claim* we glean the notion of parampara that resists homogenous codification and fossilization through institutionalization.

The particular source in which authority is invested affects notions of authenticity and creates a particular kind of *subjectivity* where each individual’s “feelings, tastes, opinions” (OxfordDictionary.com) are informed by their historical, social, and political situatedness which in turn constructs their identity or sense of self. Specifically, notions of authenticity and authority relate to the affective nature of Gurbani Kirtan whose goal is to transform subjectivity by transgressing conceptual thought and ego-reflexivity, (Mandair 2009, 361-2) to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct notions of the Sikh self.

### **Gurbani Kirtan: Constructing, Reconstructing, and Deconstructing Sikh Identity**

The hymns enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Scripture as Guru) are authored by thirty-six devotional *bhakti* poet-saints of differing traditions, while still maintaining a cohesive soteric-aesthetic ideology promoting contemplation on the Beloved through kirtan, to transgress the ego, and experience of the Unitary nature of Reality. Historically, meditation on Gurbani both through recitation and singing has played an integral role in communal and individual worship practice not only for the main body of the Sikh community, but for the multifarious groups that can be considered a part of the Sikh community including but not limited to the Udasis, Bhattas, Rababis, Namdharis, and Sehajdharis. The unified devotional practices of these diverse groups that promote a soteriological aim, illustrate the integrative tension inherent when

the Sikh quest for a normative identity marginalizes the diversity of such practitioners. Thus it has been argued that the Sikh panth cannot be defined by the limited religious definitions that have been institutionalized over time by the Gurdwara Act of 1925 or laid out by the *SGPC* (Sikh management body - Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) in the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (code of conduct) which most readily represents the orthodox Khalsa ideal and negates or forgets the plurality of devotional practitioners within the Sikh community.

Contemporary scholars have argued that the Sikh *panth* (collective) is better understood as a fluid entity (Oberoi 1994) that Dusenbery defines as a “worship genus” (1992, 391) due to the shared private meditative and public worship practices. The notion of the Sikh panth as a *worship genus* allows us to explore the intimate relationship between the practice of reciting and singing Gurbani and the Sikh’s sense of personal and communal identity that transgresses religious or political boundaries. Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman similarly notes how “musical practices are frequently central to identity and the knowledge of self.” (1997, 260) Rather than music promoting a homogenous knowledge of the Sikh self, Gurbani Kirtan instead plays a more complex role. It is a performative and experiential practice that negotiates and mediates between the boundary spaces of self-other and past-present by bringing the past-other in contact with the present-self where “knowledge of the self is necessary for the continuation of musical practices, and hence it becomes a type of historical knowledge that connects past to present.” (Bohlman 1997, 260)

Organized by emotive raag heading, the Guru Granth Sahib is not only to be read as a text, but also to be heard, sung, and embodied via the devotional practices of meditation, recitation, and singing. (Bhagal 2011, 221) The Gurbani hymns enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib espouse both a temporally mindful (socio-political) and spiritually insightful



(soteriological) message to be enacted through the “psycho-emotional aesthetic” (Protopapas 2011) of raag and taal through a process of “deep listening.” (Becker 2004) As an affective devotional activity, Gurbani Kirtan has the ability to disrupt the circularity of the ego’s *auto-affection* that identifies and names the self, and in turn productively open the self toward a liberative consciousness where the practitioner embodies the Gurbani, as the living Guru.<sup>30</sup> (Shackle and Mandair 2005, Mandair 2009) Janice Protopapas recognizes the affective nature of Gurbani Kirtan as cohering communal identity where it acts as an “ongoing signification and phenomenological hermeneutics, [where] the community remembers itself” (2011, 355-6) because it “puts into play an emotional effect between the performer and the audience where identity is both constructed and reconstructed.” (2011 342) Kramer (2002) additionally notes that music has the ability to transform identity altogether.

Music has the power to give its makers and auditors alike a profound sense of their own identities, to form a kind of precious materialization of their most authentic selves, in the mode of both personal and group identity. But at the same

---

<sup>30</sup> Gurbani’s affectively soteriological nature is eloquently expressed by Guru Ramdas in *raag bilaval* on page 799 of the Guru Granth Sahib (translation by author):

*Bilāval mēhlā 4.*

Bilaaval, Fourth Mehl:

*Hamrā chīṭ lubḥaṭ mohi bikḥiā baho ḍurmaṭ mail bḥarā.*

My consciousness desires attachment and is filled with false thinking my brother.

*Tumhrī sevā kar na sakah prabh ham kio kar mugaḍḥ tarā. ||1||*

I cannot do your seva, Oh Prabh ~ Why do I act ignorantly? I cannot cross over. ||1||

*Mere man jap narhar nām narharā.*

O my mind, chant the Name of Narhar, the Lord of man.

*Jan ūpar kirpā parabh dhārī mil satgur pār parā. ||1|| rahāo.*

Prabh has showered mercy upon His servant; meeting with the True Guru, he is carried across. ||1||Pause||

*Hamre pitā thākur parabh suāmī har deh maṭī jas karā.*

O my Father, my Lord-Master, Prabh! Bless me with understanding, may I sing Your Praises.

*Jin kao tumh har melhu suāmī te nhāe santokḥ gur sarā.*

Those whom You unite with Yourself, O Lord-Master, bathe in the Guru's pool of contentment.

*Ḍurmaṭ mail gaī har bḥajiā jan Nānak pār parā. ||4||3||*

Vibrating Hari, false thinking is washed away; servant Nanak is carried across. ||4||3||

time music has the power to alienate the sense of both types of identity. . . [And] at least unsettle the sense of identity and may even undo it altogether. (Kramer 2002, 6; quoted in Bhogal 2011, 225)

Thus, Gurbani Kirtan can be understood as activity, which not only constructs and reconstructs a communal and individual identity, but also deconstructs an ego-centered identity. Due to music's affective nature, both *reformist* and *parampara* revivalists link the traditional musical style of these mystics with devotional experience. They argue that following the parameters of traditional Gurbani Kirtan sung in raag accompanied by stringed instruments enables one to eventually attain the mystical experience of unitive consciousness expressed in the musico-poetic scriptural texts. However, Gurbani Kirtan musicians subscribe to varying parameters and styles of musical expression questioning notions of authority and authenticity. In this way, the renaissance of traditional Gurbani Kirtan is more productively understood as “*a creative act of renewal*, and perhaps not to capture meanings and chisel them into stone for others to bow down to in silence.” (Bhogal 2011, 229) It is through this creatively productive lens that I will explore the contemporary renaissance as not only being an “orthodox Sikh search for authenticity” (van der Linden 2011, 394) but also reflecting a continual identity negotiation since colonization and modernization. By elucidating the “integrative tensions” (Bhogal 2011) at work within the renaissance and Gurbani Kirtan we can circumvent current discussions surrounding the Gurbani Kirtan revival, that attempts to retrieve an authentic “sacred sound” origin.<sup>31</sup> As I engage with these discussions, I will show how it becomes more productive to look at Gurbani Kirtan as an activity with a particular methodology to unravel identity by transgressing the ego for the possibility of a newly creative subjectivity.

---

<sup>31</sup> The notion of “sacred sound” is problematic because it implies a hegemonic Vedic economy of sound, which creates an “ontological dualism” (Mandair 2009, 336) between the sacred and profane, religious and secular, temporal and eternal, where Gurbani explicitly denounces such dualistic perception.

### **Integrative Tension: Parampara-Maryada**

Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of the tension between the [traditional] text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation but consciously bringing it out. (Gadamer 306; quoted in Bruns 210)

The Gurbani Kirtan parampara has been passed down from the times of the Gurus transmitting an expansive notion of Sikh subjectivity to the Sikh community through the *psycho-emotional* embodiment of Gurus' *soteric-aesthetic* bani. Rather than being an anachronistic or nostalgic attempt to revive a particular musical style simply because it is linked to the historical times or musical preferences of the Gurus, heritage musicians have worked to revive the Gurbani Kirtan parampara's pedagogic methodology that promotes a transformative notion of Sikh identity. It is this opening of a normatively defined Sikh identity toward an experientially transformative understanding of the Sikh-self which many next-generation diasporic youth are positively responding to as is witnessed by the number of workshops, kirtan *darbar* gatherings, discussions on web forums and social networking sites, YouTube videos and websites dedicated to traditional Gurbani Kirtan. Nevertheless, Sikh musical identity continues to be defined by modern institutions which, in an attempt to promote the independence of Sikh identity and widely disseminate its practices, have inevitably re-formed Sikh musicality into a restrained idiom.

Thus Gurbani Kirtan parampara refers to a mode of knowledge transmission based on what is perceived as the authority of the Gurus' *rahit* (found in the Guru Granth Sahib as well as operative practices) that teaches a particular way of performing Gurbani Kirtan (raags, instrumentations) through a particular pedagogic methodology that describes a process for imbibing the bani within the self with the goal of ultimately transforming an ego-based

subjectivity. This parampara mode of tradition claims to allow for qualified musical innovation over time as well as a porous Sikh identity not restricted by a fossilized maryada.

The Gurbani Kirtan parampara can be compared and contrasted with the contemporary Gurmat Sangeet movement. While both are working to revive traditional Gurbani Kirtan by promoting the affective nature of emotive raag melodies, the parampara resists the modern attempts to reform Gurmat Sangeet into a bounded “maryada.” Gurmat Sangeet promotes a rahit that follows the musicology of the Guru Granth Sahib by stating that it is necessary to sing Gurbani in the raags “prescribed” by their raag headings. This becomes problematic however, when it denies the historical memory and practice of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara by questioning the authority of those vintage *shabd-reet*s (heritage compositions) that have been transmitted over time and rejecting those that were not sung in prescribed raags. At the same time, Gurmat Sangeet reformists have attempted to standardize the presentation of raags into a defined Sikh form. Ironically however, they have done so in large part based on modern Hindustani music convention and not on the memory and particular practices of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara. Such “hermeneutic chaos” has created neo-traditional and quasi-traditional musical and instrumental forms based on varying and selective notions of authority and authenticity causing an ideological and practical rift within the contemporary renaissance of Gurbani Kirtan.

By identifying the tensions inherent in the movement between *parampara* praxis and a standardized *maryada* we see that the *hyphenated* “parampara-maryada” exposes a rift<sup>32</sup> or irreconcilable difference where neither is excluded nor contained. (Bruns 2006) Thus parsing apart notions of tradition in the lived relationship between *parampara-maryada* can be difficult because “*maryada* and *parampara* stay so close together that they become synonymous and are embodied in a single creative act of significance.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2000) *Parampara-maryada* thus is the mutual sharing of a painful difference where the shift from a discipline or

---

<sup>32</sup> “Riss” Heidegger “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935), taken from Bruns 1992.

methodology of musical action that is heterogeneous has become codified into a homogeneous normative “tradition” to be interpreted and reproduced in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The modern era and colonial encounter have caused Sikhs to forget and disassociate with traditional Gurbani Kirtan, which has come to be perceived as replicating an elitist power-knowledge dichotomy. While the current episteme promotes subaltern voices and histories, in an effort to uncover a more balanced understanding, it is also important to not forget the value of remembering and learning from the parampara. In particular it is helpful to acknowledge that today, knowledge is no longer under elite purview but is available to all those who have a desire to learn.

Knowledge gained through experience (*gnosis*), informs how Sikhs interpret notions of authenticity, authority, and orthopraxy. Since there are many ways to gain knowledge through experience it is important to question, what is informing one’s gnosis? Is it through the written word, through one’s teacher, through another’s interpretations, or through one’s personal experience? Rather than promoting one over the other, it is important to acknowledge how one’s experiences inform one’s perspective and resulting discursive ideologies. In this way, it becomes productive to allow diversity into the present episteme, to enable a balanced approach informed by scholarship and education.

Within the debate there are differing perspectives all reacting to a lack of mutual acknowledgement within the field and all expressing a deep concern to maintain traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan, though with differing notions of what it entails. While it is difficult to critique the dedicated efforts to revive Gurbani Kirtan, there are important issues to be responded to when preserving the past for qualified evolution in the future. Today orthopraxic regulations are being made in the name of “tradition” without an acknowledgement of past operative practices, thus erasing diversity of expression within the genre. When modern forms are being

labeled as original while at the same time devaluing those extant originary practices, it creates a “hermeneutic chaos” within the field, with the Gurbani Kirtan students and *sangat* (Sikh congregation) as the unassuming victims.

As I attempt to bring out the tensions between traditional learning, institutionalization, and innovative creativity to unravel contemporary notions of the Sikh self, I am reminded to maintain the messiness inherent in the retelling of history and the present. Rather than creating a reductionist story of loss and recovery that falls into the classic dichotomization between the pre- and postcolonial histories or between the preservation and the invention of traditions, instead I am interested in looking at how these conditions created particular discursive ideologies that now inform the contemporary revival. (Pemberton 24) In this way, like Foucault, I attempt to uncover a “history of the present.” (1977, 30-31) In doing so I ask how we can create a community of Gurbani Kirtan practitioners that value traditional knowledge while also appreciating each individual’s unique contribution and experience, recognizing that Sikh musical identity does not have to be subsumed by homogenous definitions but can find its own sovereignty through embracing its innate diversity.

# Chapter 1

## Sikh Devotional Music: A Historical Perspective

### 1.1 Indian Soteriology of Music

India has an age-old convention that associates music with an expression of the Divine. Dating back to the Vedic period (6th century BC) sound or *naad* was equated with the Ultimate Reality of *Brahman*. The *Vedas* themselves were ritually chanted and orally transmitted as *sruti* (eternal “sacred sound” substances). Initially recited for ritual purposes, the *Vedas* developed into philosophical treatises (the *Upanishads*) on the nature of the Ultimate Reality. One of these early expositions, the *Chandogya Upanishad*, developed the concept of *AUM*, the primal sonic symbol that eventually came to be understood as the manifestation of *Brahman* through the *prana* (life breath) of the *atman* (soul-self).

This self (atman) of mine that lies deep within my heart-it is made of mind; the vital functions (prana) are its physical form; luminous is its appearance; the real is its intention; space is its essence (atman); it contains all actions, all desires, all smells, and all tastes; it has captured this whole world; it neither speaks nor pays any heed...It is Brahman. On departing from here after death, I will become that. (Olivelle, 209: CU 3.14.2-4)

The concept of a vocalized sacred sound being equated with *Brahman* in the early 6th century BC is further developed in the 8th century CE when Matanga’s *Brhaddesi* gives the earliest exposition of the concept of *Nada-Brahman* as the sonic foundation of the Ultimate Reality. “Now I shall expound the highest definition of nada: Without nada, song cannot exist; without nada, the scale degrees cannot exist...in the form of nada, Brahma is said to exist...”<sup>33</sup>

Bharata’s *Natyasatra* 200 CE provides the earliest treatise on the aesthetic relationship between *raag* (melodic mode) and *rasa* (mood), further expanded by Abhinavagupta’s 11th

---

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Rowell, 43.

century commentary. Initially *rasa* had been a term designating the aesthetic role of theatrical arts to produce emotion in its audience. However, Bharata and Abhinavagupta developed this term into an emotive experience that is created by *raag* melody, expanding *rasa* to a transcendental experience defined by Abhinavagupta as “aesthetic rapture.”<sup>34</sup> (Rowell, 327-329) In addition, Sarngadeva’s *Sangitaratnakara* also perpetuated the ideology that the sonic continuum of the Ultimate Reality could be manifested and experienced through music.

We worship that divine sound, the life of consciousness in all beings and the supreme bliss, manifested in the form of the universe. By the adoration of sound, the gods Brahma, Visnu, and Siva are truly worshipped, for they are the embodiment of sound. The Soul, having a desire to speak, stirs the mind. The mind strikes the fire abiding in the body, and that fire strikes the wind. Then that wind abiding in the region of Brahma, rising along the upward paths, manifests the sound successively in the navel, the heart, the throat, the head and the mouth. (Sarngadeva, *Sangitaratnakara* 1.3.1-4)<sup>35</sup>

This 13th century document also made the important distinction between *marga* - “classical” esoteric music and *desi* - “popular” provincial entertainment music.

Marga is that which has been discovered by Brahman...Marga certainly bestows spiritual well being. But that music...which delights people of different regions and is born of different aesthetic tastes, is called *desi*. (*Sangitaratnakara* 1.1.22-4)

<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Rowell notes the ideological tension present in notions of music as inducing both *moksa* and *kama*; “music is valued not only for the delight that it brings through sensory experience but also because it provides a glimpse of the reality that is to be sought beyond the reach of the senses.” (Rowell, 18) Abhinavagupta does distinguish *gandharva* (ritual) music performed for spiritual benefit from *gana* (entertainment) music whose purpose is mere enjoyment (*rasa*). (Sanyal and Widdess 39) However within *bhakti* (devotion), the notion of *rasa* comes to transgress the mundane realms and be equated with the experience of esoteric realms. Regardless, the notion of *rasa* has both effectively and affectively come to constitute the same emotive experience (Ho 2006, 18) with transformative potential.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Rowell 38-39.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Sanyal and Widdess 39.



The ideological foundation of Indian musical theory therefore rests on notions that equate sound with the Ultimate Reality, but separates music as entertainment from ancient music that adheres to strict parameters for the goal of Divine attainment and merger.<sup>37</sup>

Over time, music became a part of ritual devotion throughout the various regional traditions and was viewed by the bhakti traditions as the path to communion with the divine. The term bhakti stems from the verb root *bhaj*, which can be translated as to partake or to love emphasizing the devotees' loving relationship to their object of affection.<sup>38</sup> The object of devotion can either be the unmanifest *nirgun* (formless/without qualities) or manifest *sargun* (formed/with qualities) aspect of the Divine. The bhakti mode of worship and communion through singing the praises of the Divine in classical Indian musical modes allows the practitioners to experience a merging of *shabd* (word) with raag to create an emotive rasa experience. Here the individual self merges with the Divine through loving devotion. The *dhrupad* musical genre is often equated with bhakti devotion because in this musical genre the *bani* (hymn) is given primacy over musical elements. Although dhrupad is commonly considered a "classical" tradition equated with the *darbari* royal courts, its prototype can be seen in the 13th- 16th centuries *Vaishnava* bhakti temple tradition of the Braj region of northern India with its four-part musical structure of *asthayi*, *antara*, *sanchari* and *abogh*.<sup>39</sup>

## 1.2 Sikh Devotional Music

Sikh devotional music stems from the *desi cum margi* bhakti tradition of 15th century northern India. Guru Nanak sang Gurbani Kirtan in both the "desi" popular folk styles used for

---

<sup>37</sup> "In its underlying and self-fulfilling assumption that a particular melodic structure insures the communication of affect from person to person, the tradition of raag has become one of the primary means by which Indian culture has become sensitized and perhaps even instructed in emotive life" (Rowell 179).

<sup>38</sup> Thielemann, Selina (2001) *Musical Traditions of Vaishnava Temples in Vraja: A comparative study of samaja and the dhrupada tradition of North Indian classical music: Volume I and II*. Sagar Printers and Publishers, New Delhi

<sup>39</sup> See the works of Professor Meilu Ho 2006 and 2013.

life-cycle rituals and other ceremonies (*alaahniah* -songs for death, *ghorian* -marriage songs, *aarti* -prayers, etc.) as well as the “margi” dhrupad genre popularly used for devotional singing.<sup>40</sup> (Singh, Pashaura 2006) Guru Nanak and the succeeding Gurus used both dhrupad/*dhurpad*<sup>41</sup> and folk forms for the singing of Gurbani Kirtan so that their messages of temporal and spiritual union could be understood and imbibed by the congregation. The Sikh Gurus stressed the importance of music that maintained a devotional aim sung by a singer with a spiritual intent and musical proficiency so as to not draw the mind away from focus on the Divine. (Singh, Pashaura 2006)

Connecting a specific notion of musical aesthetics with divine experience was continued by both bhakti and Sikh praxis with emphasis on evoking an experience of the divine *Nam* (un-nameable) through *simran* (meditation) and *kirtan* (singing). The Gurbani of the saint-poets all emphasize a mystical notion of individual sovereignty<sup>42</sup> where personal liberation is found through the transformation of an individual’s perception through meditation on the Nam rather than through rituals performed without meditative consciousness. Thus authority is derived from an authentic experience of the Divine. In Gurbani Kirtan it is the *chitt* (meditative

---

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Francesca Cassio also recognizes that “According to Sanyal-Widdess (2004), the dhruva-prabhanda described in the *Sangitratnakara* (12th century) ‘is likely to be the most relevant early form for the history of dhrupad’ (2004, 232).” Which she states was most “probably assimilated” into the dhrupad genre in the 15th century, at which time it became recognized as a deified marga form. It then developed into the popular court genre in the 16th-17th centuries. (Cassio 2013)

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Francesca Cassio (2013) explains that the Punjabi and Urdu pronunciation of dhrupad is in fact *Dhurpad*. “According to Bhai Baldeep Singh...dhrupad may be in fact the vernacular form of the original word Dhurpada, meaning the verses (pade) revealed by the Dhur (the Origin, the Creator).” Bhai Baldeep cites a line from Gurbani in support of this notion: “*Dhur ki bani aee, Tin sagalee chint mitaee* (From the One comes the bani, Thus all anxiety is effaced).” (SGGS 628) Thus the dhurpad genre can be understood as one emanating from a revealed soteric experience. Cassio further states: “A classical form of dhurpad performed in Punjab is presently represented by the Talwandi gharana of the late Mohammed Hafiz Khan, as documented by the extensive fieldwork and analysis done by Basra and B.B. Singh. We also find an important mention of the Punjabi Dhurpad in the *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul-Fazl-Allami (c.1590). In the chapter about *Sangit* (music) performed at Akbar’s time (1542-1605).” The *Ain-i-Akbari* mentions: “Dhurpad consists of four rhythmical lines without any definite prosodical length of words or syllables. [...] The *kalavants* are well known, and sing Dhurpad [...]”. (*Abul-Fazl-Allami*, Engl. Transl., 1907:256)

<sup>42</sup> Sovereign identity in this sense is one that has displaced the ego as the center of all production; a space where non-ego dominated speech and action arises. The poetic Gurbani arises from this sovereign space of a Guru-oriented *gurmukh* (contrasted with the self-centered *Manmukh*).

consciousness) which must be present to evoke the shabd along with the musical mastery of raag and taal. As expressed in the bani of the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das (b. 1534); “Amongst all raag and naad, those are sublime, O brother, which enables the mind-heart (man) to be in a constant state of remembrance [of the Divine], that raag and naad are true and their price cannot be said.”<sup>43</sup> (SGGS 1423) In other words, the Sikh Gurus promote those musical aesthetics that evoke a spiritual rasa and enable remembrance on the Nam. The notion of rasa has both effectively and affectively come to constitute the emotive experience with the transformative potential to transgress from the mundane to the liberative realms.

Guru Nanak had an enlightening experience around the age of thirty that was expressed through poetic prose in the seminal Sikh prayer *Japji Sahib*, which opens with the statement “*Ik Oankar*.” Ik is the numeral one which represents absolute Oneness as pure interiority without form or qualities - *nirgun*, while at the same time being Oankar, the manifestation of creation as all form or qualities - *sargun*. (Shackle and Mandair 2005) With the simple yet profound expression of Ik Oankar, Guru Nanak unified two seemingly contradictory notions of the Divine. Bhai Gurdas notes Guru Nanak’s reformatory approach; “He preached in this dark age (*kaliyug*) that sargun (Brahm) and nirgun (Parbrahm) are the same and identical.”<sup>44</sup> (Vaar 1: Pauri 23) Guru Nanak promoted the understanding that *nirgun bhakti* (the mystical loving relationship between the self and the formless Divine) and *sargun bhakti* (loving devotion to the many manifestations of the Divine), though appearing to be contrasting devotional methods, were indeed non-dual; both being facets of the bhakti process to access the manifold aspects of the Divine that is paradoxically at the same time One and All.

Guru Nanak expressed the virtues of the oneness of creation and the experience of merger with that One through devotional singing of Gurbani Kirtan. Gurbani Kirtan continues to be an important part of Sikh practice and is the primary form of Sikh “music”. Gurbani incorporates

---

<sup>43</sup> Singh, Manmohan transl. (1996)

<sup>44</sup> In Singh, Jodh (1998) “*Paarabrahamu Pooran Brahamu Kalijougi Andari Iku Dikhaaiaa*”

two words, Guru and Bani (“poetic” utterance). The term Guru stems from the roots *gu* (darkness) and *ru* (light) and refers to a teacher that can bring the disciple from darkness (ignorance) to light (knowledge). Kirtan, commonly referred to as devotional singing, is formed from the roots *kirti* (praise), and *rattan/rat* (to dye) and *tan* (the body). (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2001) Thus, the definition of Gurbani Kirtan is rooted in the bhakti practice of singing the poetic utterances of the enlightened ones, which dyes the body in loving praise of the Divine. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2001) Guru Arjan expresses this concept in raag Maru, “The pleasures of *maya* (illusion) fade away in an instant, as the shade of a passing cloud. The ones alone who, along with the Guru, sing the Praises of the Creator Beloved are dyed in deep red (Love).”<sup>45</sup> (SGGS 1003) The Gurbani hymns are spontaneous expressions of liberative experiences, the singing of which have developed into a means of identifying with the Divine through loving devotion. In this way, Gurbani Kirtan intimately connects musical aesthetics with the Bani (Word) as an expression of and way to commune with the Divine.

At the root of Gurbani Kirtan consists an understanding of the inability of discursive language to adequately convey the experience of that One, whereas singing allows one to better express the bani’s poetry, pregnant with meaning, by evoking feeling through emotive raags. Guru Nanak expresses: “What words can we speak to evoke Love? In the ambrosial hours before dawn (Amrit Vela) chant the Nam, and contemplate its Greatness...O Nanak, sing the praises of the [Divine] Treasure. Sing, and listen, and let your mind-heart (*man*) be filled with love. Your pain will be sent far away, and peace will come to your home.”<sup>46</sup> (SGGS 2)

Guru Nanak’s philosophy stresses the importance of the act of loving remembrance of the One. Guru Nanak urged his disciples to practice Gurbani Kirtan and *Nam Simran* (remembrance of the Nam). Meditation on the Nam becomes spontaneous loving devotion on the Divine Other, letting go of ego-based attachments in order to experience a merger with the Divine. (Shackle

---

<sup>45</sup> Singh, Manmohan transl. (1996)

<sup>46</sup> Singh, Manmohan transl. (1996)

and Mandair 2005) Guru Nanak's Sikhs (lit. learners) continued these transformative practices both as a means of worship as well as tools to enlightened consciousness.

### 1.3 Sovereign Identity within the Gurus' Bani

Guru Nanak penned his nine hundred seventy-three hymns, sung in nineteen raag-based melodies, into *pothi* books and 1539 he passed these on to his successor Guru Angad (b.1504). (Shankar and Kaur 2005) This practice was continued from Guru to successor through the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan, who in 1604 compiled these hymns, along with those of selected Hindu and Muslim saints and mystics from the bhakti and sant traditions, into the *Adi Granth* (Primal Book). (Shankar and Kaur 2005) This compilation authorized those banis that were deemed as authentic expressions of Divine experience. In total, the *Adi Granth* has thirty six authors; seven of which are Sikh Gurus, while fifteen are sant and bhakti saint poets from various creeds and casts, notably Sheik Farid, Namdev, Kabir, and Ravidas; eleven are poets of the Guru's court and three are devoted disciples of the Guru including Bhai Mardana (Guru Nanak's Muslim *rababi* [rabab playing] companion). (Shankar and Kaur 2005)

The diversity of the *Adi Granth's* authorship illustrates the notion of equality in diversity inherent in the Sikh worldview which started with Guru Nanak and continued through Guru Arjan, who included into the *Adi Granth* banis from the Sikh tradition as well as those of bhakti-sant mystics whose philosophical perspective was consistent with the egalitarian message of the Sikh Gurus. The banis enshrined in the *Granth* have a commonality in that they metaphorically utilize temporal realities such as life, death, longing, and love to symbolize the process of spiritual attainment. The mystical path promotes the notion that sovereign authority comes from a personal relationship between the self and Divine Other. In other words, the Sikh Gurus and the saint-poets realized that the authority to express the state of spiritual attainment comes from an aesthetic experience where the transient-temporal self finds a new mode of expression that is not caught in the circularity of auto-affection (of redefining the ego and naming the self) but

instead effaces the ego-self through inculcating the *Nam*<sup>47</sup>, for a new mode of sovereign expression. (Mandair 2009)

The unifying nature of Gurbani started with Guru Nanak, was continued by Guru Arjan with the creation of the *Adi Granth*, and was then bestowed with a sovereign authority by the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. In 1708 Guru Gobind Singh declared the *Adi Granth* as the final and enduring Sikh Guru, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Removing the guruship from an individual human authority<sup>48</sup> and placing it in the musico-poetic bani clearly represents the goal of Sikh devotional practice, which is to actively imbibe the Gurbani in order to transform one's subjectivity from an ego-centered *manmukh* to a Guru-centered *gurmukh* for Divine Union.

The Sikh Gurus elevated the temporal to the spiritual realms to support the dual-notion of Sikh sovereignty not only via the musico-poetic Gurbani music, but also through the instrumentation of *Gurbani Sangeet* as is referenced by the Gurbani Kirtan *parampara* (heritage). It is said that Guru Hargobind reappropriated the peacock symbol of Mughal authority by creating the *taus* (peacock shaped stringed instrument) as a response to the *Takht-e-Taus* (peacock throne) of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (who ruled oppressively after the death of his father Jahangir in 1627.)<sup>49</sup> The Sikh Gurus transformed symbols of temporal authority through musical aesthetics to invoke spiritual experience and sovereign identity within the Sikh panth.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Nam* is a central transcendental concept in Sikh theology, meaning “the Name of the un-nameable Ultimate Reality.”

<sup>48</sup> In 1699 Guru Gobind Singh made the Khalsa, also investing authority in the *GurKhalsa* or *Guru-panth*, Sikh collective.

<sup>49</sup> The appropriation of Mughal authority with the *taus* instrument was conveyed to me by Bhai Baldeep Singh.



Figure 2: Bhai Avtar Singh playing the *taus* - instrument with peacock-shaped front piece. Handcrafted by Bhai Baldeep Singh. Photo courtesy of Bhai Baldeep Singh.

The notion of a sovereign Sikh identity being one that is focused on the Divine and accessed through aesthetic mediums evolved with the Sixth Guru. Guru Hargobind (b. 1595) became the Guru after the martyrdom of his father Guru Arjan in 1606 at the hands of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. He advanced the Gurus' socio-political message of equality and personal sovereignty through embodying the *sant-sipahi* (saintly-warrior) ideal by wearing garb previously only worn by royalty and donning two swords representing the Sikh's *Miri* (political) and *Piri* (spiritual) sovereignty.

Guru Gobind Singh, like his predecessors, continued to promote the Miri-Piri concept of Sikh sovereignty. In 1699 he gave a permanent form to the sant-sipahi ideal through dress and

conduct, with the creation of the *Khalsa* (lit. pure) brotherhood of Sikh initiates, whose naming re-appropriates the Persian term *khalisah* referring to that which is under direct authority and control of the Mughal Empire. Guru Gobind Singh created a radical notion of authority based on the temporal (miri) authority of the Khalsa *panth* (collective) and then further investing spiritual (piri) authority in the Bani as Guru, enshrined in the miri (temporal) authority of the Guru Granth Sahib in 1708. (Cole 58) Guru Gobind Singh also continued the patronage of *dhadi* balladeers, initiated by his grandfather Guru Hargobind, who engendered the sant-sipahi and miri-piri ideologies within the Gur-Khalsa through the *vir rasa* (heroic-aesthetic) ballads enshrined in the *Dasam Granth*. (Nijahawan 2006) The miri-piri ideology espoused by the Sikh Gurus and expressed through the emotive musico-poetic aesthetic blurs the boundaries between the temporal-political and spiritual-mystical realms for an experience of the unitary nature of the Ultimate Reality.

Although authority was based both in the spiritual Gurbani and temporal Guru-panth, the *Singh Sabha* reforms of 1870s to 1920s shifted authority largely to the temporal realm by creating Sikhs as a people of the Book, where having a Scripture distinguished Sikhism as a World Religion. (Cole 58)

## 1.4 Shifting Musical Patronage

### 1.4.1 From Temple to Court

The shift from temple to court patronage during Islamic Mughal rule (1526-1858) heralded a new era for both the musicians and their genres and created a new category of *darbari sangeet* (court music) that utilized “margi” musical forms for an entertainment purpose. The courts employed master musicians to symbolize their royal prestige as patrons of the arts as well as for their own musical education as high-cultured rulers. Since the Muslim courts settled in the north, pre-existing Indian musical genres became influenced by Persian and Central Asian forms. With the incursion of a new socio-political atmosphere and new forms of patronage, originally



autonomous genres began to merge where devotional genres became used for the entertainment of royal courts. The dhrupad and *khayal* (modern classical) genres as they are witnessed today developed from this interaction.<sup>50</sup>

#### 1.4.2 From “Religious” to Political Institutions

There had been great upheaval and turmoil in the Punjabi Sikh community in the 1700s with the transition from the succession of living Sikh Gurus to the scriptural Guru Granth Sahib. During this time the Sikhs were involved in guerilla-style warfare with the Mughal Empire leaving their *Gurdwara* temples under the custodianship of Sikh *mahant* priests from the *Udasi* and *Nirmala* sects. These mahant priests maintained and upheld Sikh knowledge and memory as important patrons of rababi and kirtaniya performers of traditional Gurbani Kirtan. (Purewal 8; B. Gurcharan Kanwal 59)

The 1800s saw the end of Sikh-Mughal discord when the Mughal court dispersed due in part to the incursion of British Colonialism. This era brought Enlightenment Ideology to the Indian cultural arena, privileging reason and the separation of the democratic public from the private religious sphere. (van der Veer 2001) During this time, previously fluid Indian cultural traditions were markedly separated through western ideology and education, creating a separation between the “secular” and “religious” realms. (Oberoi 1994)

In response, the Singh Sabha movement was initiated to institute Sikh “religious” reform. In doing so, they promoted the orthodox Khalsa ideal with an agenda to take back the Gurdwaras from the control of the non-Khalsa mahants who were seen as abusing their role for personal power and profit, and put them under Khalsa Sikh rule. This reform movement resulted in the

---

<sup>50</sup> Dhrupad’s popularity as a spiritual-aesthetic genre lasted until the 18th and 19th centuries when it was overtaken by the khayal genre, which emphasizes musical skill over devotional text. The khayal genre is marked by the stylistic freedom of improvisation and “revolves around the melodic-rhythmic axis” whereas dhrupad is “anchored to the melodic-poetic axis.” (Raja 2005,188) Today “traditional” forms of Gurmat Sangeet are sung in the khayal genre, the appropriateness and historical accuracy of which is questioned by those who view its entertainment elements as discordant with the meditative and devotional purpose of the bani, perceived as being affectively conveyed through the devotional dhrupad genre.

Gurdwara Act of 1925 that, among other initiatives, established the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to manage the historic Gurdwaras in the Punjab. (McLeod 1995)

The late 19th and early 20th century reform movements brought change to the socio-religious institutions that had previously produced Gurbani Kirtan patrons. Originally there were three Gurbani Kirtan *taksals* (institutions of learning): *Amritsar* (Dist. Amritsar), *Sekhwan* (Dist. Firozpur) and *Girwari* (Dist. Hoshiarpur), the latter two being initiated by Bhai Dharam Singh (of Guru Gobind Singh's "Five Beloved, *Panj Piyare*") after Guru Gobind Singh left his body.

Immediately after the demise of Tenth Guru, institutes of Gurmat Sangeet had started flourishing not only in Punjab, but in the entire country. Such educational institutes were very successful under the leadership of many mahants (who were knowledgeable about kirtan traditions). Many of the great scholars were the product of these institutes but with the passage of time, these educational institutes and *deras* breathed their last...since politics started to have a say over religion, the standard of those institutes, instead of getting a boost, started sliding downwards. (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 71)



Figure 3: Original Gurbani Kirtan taksals in Punjab: *Amritsar* (Dist. Amritsar), *Sekhwan* (Dist. Firozpur), *Girwari* (Dist. Hoshiarpur).

Until the 19th century colonial reform, the post-Guru era of early 18th century continued to emphasize classical branches of learning, initially inspired by Guru Gobind Singh who promoted scholarship amongst his Sikhs as a “race of warriors and students.” (Leitner 28)

Between 1765 and 1833 there were more than 70 *bungas* (grand houses) on the *prakarma* (walkway) surrounding the Golden Temple, belonging to individuals and communities as places to house pilgrims or as places of learning. (Kaur, Madanjit 1983, 180) “Several bungas provided instruction in the interpretation and commentaries of the Sikh scriptures, as well as classical vocal and instrumental music (rag vidya).”<sup>51</sup> (Madra and Singh, intro.) Other bungas taught languages, sciences, mathematics, and calligraphy. In the 20th century the bungas were demolished. This was partly due to the changes introduced during the British Raj.

The Sikhs ultimately lost the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1845-49); the subsequent annexation of Punjab to Britain’s Indian territories in 1849 led to the devastating loss of royal Sikh patronage of the temple, the bungas and the arts... Their loss marked the final nail in the coffin for a culture of learning that once nourished a nation of ‘warrior-students’. (Madra and Singh, intro.)

Commissioner of Amritsar Division Robert Needham Cust (1821-1909), clearly demonstrates the British Raj’s conspiratorial “policy of non-interference” during this time: “Leave it [Harimandir Sahib] to itself and withdraw from it the patronage of the State, resume the lands set aside for the support of the brotherhood of Granthis, Pujaris, Ragis, and Rababis, and the splendour of the institution will pass away....” (Cust, 55; quoted in Madra and Singh, intro.)

British Imperialism removed patronage that had previously supported Sikh schools of learning, and replaced them with British run educational institutions. Sikh elites trained in Western scholarship used this knowledge, supported by new print media, as tools towards India’s

---

<sup>51</sup> Found in the introduction (no page numbers) to *The Golden Temple of Amritsar, Reflections of the Past (1808-1959)*.

independence. National reformists focused on economic and religious progress, with the negative effect of displacing traditional spiritual-aesthetic knowledge.

This demise of indigenous artistic expression and learning continued into the post-colonial era. It was in 1947, the year Amritsar became a border city following Punjab's partition, that the Sikh gurdvara [sic] authorities themselves began buying up and destroying the bungas... In later years, commercial considerations conspired to topple artistic sensibilities once and for all. (Madra and Singh, intro)

### 1.4.3 From Private to Public Commercial

After India's Independence in 1947, with the dissolution of courtly and religious patronage along with the increasing popularity of film, recording, and radio technology, the musician as knowledgeable specialist (*vidwan*) gave way to the musician as professional. In order to make a living wage, musicians had to tailor their art to their new "market as patron." (Qureshi 1999, 67) Singers could now gain notoriety by incorporating the new, catchy film tunes in their musical repertoire. (Marcus 103)

The democratic accessibility of musical notation and recording technology caused musical styles to become even more diversified within the new public sphere, offering mediated representations of musical authority and communal memory. Older "classical" genres were diluted and blended with "popular" styles to appeal to a musically diverse audience. Gurbani Kirtan was not exempt from this interaction where traditional *guru-shishya* (teacher-student) oral mode of transmitting specialized musical knowledge was replaced with accessible recorded media creating the professional ragi that catered to the personal tastes of the public as patron.

Before the rise of popular music, Indian musicians had worked to orally maintain and transfer the music of their predecessors. George Grierson, a colonial-era British civil service researcher of North Indian folk music observes: "In the country districts, I have never heard of a new tune being invented. There seems to be a certain stock of melodies ready made, to which the words of every new song must be fitted." (Marcus 102) While Grierson's scope is limited,

traditional compositions were heralded for their felicity to their predecessors' works, as well as for their ability to continually create new renderings that were aesthetically complimentary to those original compositions. Nevertheless, due to the modern perception that traditional music was a stagnant genre, the advent of film music was viewed as a positive step towards creating more diversity and innovation within the Indian music sphere. However, authors such as Regula Qureshi and Peter Manuel point out that the commercialization of the film industry was itself an "oligopolistic structure" that controlled the market of musical production, in effect standardizing music for a "pan-regional audience." (Manuel 58)

To counter the domination of the film industry, Manuel observes in his seminal book, *Cassette Culture*, that the inception of cassette technology in the 1970s revolutionized North India's musical scene through a process he coins "democratic-participation." (2) No longer was musical taste and production dictated by the elite, centralized ownership of the film, radio and gramophone industries.<sup>52</sup> Cassettes instead acted as a form of grass-roots media that created a decentralized system of ownership, control and consumption. (Manuel 3) This "emancipatory" new media form allowed for diversity within the music industry, which gave a voice to subaltern communities. (Manuel 4) However, cassette music was subject to the popular trends of the purchasing community, which also affected the musical styles of devotional genres such as Gurbani Kirtan.

The popularization of North Indian music through the film and recording industries has created what Qureshi has termed "hegemony through style" where "a solo voice accompanied by the harmonium and tabla became the ubiquitous sound combination for all recorded song." (Qureshi 1999, 72) This ensemble replaced the stringed and percussion instruments that were

---

<sup>52</sup> Gramophone technology was popular amongst the elites in 1930 India. Its expensive playback system made it more expensive than going to films, full of musical entertainment. In the 1940s gramophones, as a sight of musical enjoyment for high-class Indians, were replaced by the radio industry. In the 1950s All India Radio broadcasting was used to create a national Hindu identity, and therefore only played Classical Hindustani music. Though it upheld the traditional musical aesthetics, it once again acted as a sight for hegemonic domination. (Qureshi 68-88)

larger, harder to transport, tune, and master. However, the harmonium's fixed tonal nature is not an effective accompanying instrument when attempting to sing music in raag as it cannot produce the twenty-two shrutis or microtones needed to evoke the nuanced intonations of each raag melody. (Sikh Sacred Music Society 64) As Fox Strangeways notes "besides its deadening effect on a living art, it falsifies it by being out of tune with itself." (Mansukhani 61) Nevertheless, the fact that it was easily learned and transportable made this "chest of whistles" popular during the democratization of the Indian musical sphere. The harmonium and tabla along with a sweet vocal and a memorable tune became the formula that most appealed to the large urban working class market. (Qureshi 1999, 79) This prevalent film-originated sound shaped the North Indian habitus of listening<sup>53</sup> and therefore became the preferred musical aesthetic, and was subsequently adopted by the newly professionalized Sikh ragi jathas.

Accordingly, Gurbani Kirtan melodies became less intricate, where they were sung in either light raag or no raag, and sometimes taken from Hindi film tunes. Though perhaps innocuous to the popular kirtan audience, the traditional musicians saw film tunes as antithetical to the meditative purpose of Gurbani Kirtan where "film tunes distract the mind and bring to the listener's memory a recollection of the scenes in which the original film song was sung." (Mansukhani 77) Nevertheless, the authors of film music prided themselves on being able to create catchy tunes that their audience could easily identify with and parrot, as expressed by music director Kalyangi "we try to write songs so simple that they can be hummed by everybody. Every song should be as simple as a nursery rhyme." (Manuel 50) By marketing music to the lowest "common-denominator"<sup>54</sup> audience for mass public appeal, the music industry created

---

<sup>53</sup> Judith Becker (2004) coined the term "habitus of listening" to connote the way in which people are socialized to have triggered responses to particular sounds.

<sup>54</sup> Manuel in *Cassette Culture* (1993, 58) appropriately utilizes the term "common denominator" to describe the way in which popular culture speaks to the tastes of the masses. In the interest of appealing to the widest audience, film, television, music, radio, advertising, fast food and other such producers of commodities for mass consumption have to dumb-down their product for popular appeal. Sadly this often results in the standard being lowered to appeal to people rather than raised to inspire people. However,

a new homogenized listening audience in effect setting the stage for a new attitude toward Gurbani Kirtan. No longer did people have to spend years perfecting the art of singing and instrumentation. Instead, within a few months, a Sikh could make the career choice to learn the harmonium, pick-up tunes from recordings, and become a ragi.<sup>55</sup>

In order to make money, traditional musicians became professional ragis catering to a diverse, less knowledgeable audience. They also became educators at musical colleges and took on pupils, where the focus of learning shifted from intensive disciplined study to a less rigorous and precise format. Although musical virtuosity allows for profound aesthetic expression, today Sikhs emphasize clarity of pronunciation, a sweet voice, and deep knowledge of the bani over technical proficiency. Bhai Gurcharan Singh explains:

Because of the current availability of recorded music, many people who have been blessed with an interest in kirtan and a nice voice have been able to sing hymns based on compositions from radio, films and recordings. Their sweet voices are often enjoyable to the listeners, but it is a big change from tradition.<sup>56</sup> (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 49)

Primacy of the bani therefore is often cited as justification for contemporary ragis needing less extensive musical education. Additionally, with public patronage, professional ragis have had to stylistically adapt their Gurbani Kirtan renditions to cater to the tastes of listening audiences. When ragis gain the favor of the sangat members, they become popular figureheads within the Sikh community, garnering additional income from the sales of cassettes,

---

Manuel and others are clear to point out that popularization can also have the positive effect of allowing for innovation, competition, and diversity.

<sup>55</sup> Sikh musicians were no longer praised as highly trained musicians, but instead became a mainstay in contemporary Sikh practice, which relegated them to a minimally paid service.

<sup>56</sup> Bhai Gurcharan Singh further mentions that many sangat members also sing kirtan in Gurdwaras, but their lack of training has also caused professional singers to feel as though they do not have to work as hard. “Many of these people sing kirtan as a hobby and do not invest in the hard work of learning, memorizing, and scholarship. As a result, some professional musicians have copied their style and have also avoided the hard labour. The volunteer or “nishkam” kirtan singers have become preferred by some congregations who do not want to support paid professionals. Because volunteer musicians must work at other occupations for their livelihood, they cannot invest in the education required for a kirtan singer to deliver the music and meaning of the kirtan in an impactful way.” (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 49)

CDs, VCDs, and are given slots on television channels that broadcast Gurbani Kirtan.<sup>57</sup>

However, as mediators of the Gurus' bani, it is the ragi's primary role to enliven the *Bani Guru* within the Sikh panth for focus on the Divine (*Nirankari*). Thus, roles have become blurred when approached as a musical profession to please a patron (*Darbari*) or to be sold in the public marketplace for commercial success (*Bazaari*).<sup>58</sup>

Sikh music continues to undergo stylistic changes where definitions such as "margi" and "desi" have come to take on new meanings. Specialized patronage of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara, which links musical proficiency to evoking a spiritual-aesthetic experience, has been replaced by semi-professional musicians who cater to public taste through the global marketplace of the internet and diasporic communities.

Overall, the contemporary disjuncture between notions of intent, as well as traditional and modernist Gurbani Kirtan aesthetics, is due in large part to the modernizing effect of British colonialism. New educational institutions, recording technology, and notions of democratic accessibility replaced those specialized modes of musical practice that were relegated largely to the memory of a past world:

A world where musicians practiced unceasingly until practice itself became a form of worship and its own objective, where listeners were a rare and delicate species, having the leisure to cultivate an art from early youth, to mature with age into true connoisseurs; a world, in short, where musicians of excellence flourished, being, as they were, measured only by listeners of excellence. (Neuman 20)

Due to the contemporary disjuncture between past and present musical practice brought about by socio-political changes, the advent of a new millennium brought those who wanted to

---

<sup>57</sup> Doordarshan and PTC Punjabi are television channels through Indian cable and satellite network that daily broadcast Gurbani Kirtan, either pre-recorded at a studio or live at a Sikh Gurdwara.

<sup>58</sup> The differentiation between "Nirankari, Darbari, and Bazaari" forms of Gurbani Kirtan was conveyed to Bhai Baldeep Singh by Maharaj Thakur Singh.



revive traditional Gurbani Kirtan praxis and aesthetics, questioning whether “a traditional music [can] survive in a world that appears to undermine the basis upon which it existed.” (Neuman 27)

## 1.5 Contemporary Revival and Reform

Since the 1990s there has been a revival of traditional Gurbani Kirtan practice linking authentic musical aesthetics to authoritative spiritual experience. Revivalists promote the idea that Gurbani should be sung in spiritually evocative raags to the accompaniment of stringed instruments (*rabab, saranda, taus, tanpura, dilruba*) and *jori-pakhawaj* percussion. Revivalists of traditional Gurbani Kirtan view modern Gurbani Kirtan, commonly sung in simple tunes by ragis to the accompaniment of the harmonium and tabla, as unable to create the *soteric-aesthetic*<sup>59</sup> experience expressed by the authors of the Gurbani.

They maintain the classical Indian ideology that links musical mastery to the evocation of spiritual rasas that allow for the ego-self to be imbibed with a divine experience. To promote the singing of Gurbani Kirtan in raag they cite its historical practice, the organization of the Guru Granth Sahib by raag, and the *Rahit Maryada* (established code of conduct), which states that Gurbani Kirtan means singing the shabd scriptural compositions in raag musical measures. (SGPC 2006) With this it can be understood why it is controversial for Gurbani Kirtan to be sung to film tunes and other entertainment genres which are perceived as not upholding the music’s devotional nature but instead excite the mind and cause it to shift from meditative focus on the Divine. (Mansukhani 1982)

Today there are overlapping and divergent revivalist conceptions regarding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy. While the overlapping aspects have been defined above, the divergence comes when reformists have attempted to institutionalize a normative Sikh musical identity or Gurmat Sangeet in the “Guru’s Way,” linked to the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib while

---

<sup>59</sup> *Soteric-aesthetic* refers to the use of emotionally appropriate musicality to express Gurbani Kirtan’s soteriological aim.

marginalizing the historic operative practices of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara that resist standardization. In addition to the revivalist perspectives, there are many contemporary Sikh musicians and listeners who view musical style as irrelevant to the cleansing effect of Gurbani on the mind-as-ego for Divine Union. They cite the democratic nature of Sikh practice promoted by modern technology where anyone who so desires can learn simple Gurbani Kirtan compositions from a book, tape, CD, or off the internet without having to spend countless years studying under the tutelage of a master musician. While media technologies and Sikh emigration have enabled greater accessibility and diversity within the genre, they have affected the modes of transmission, performative styles, and aesthetic preferences of Gurbani Kirtan (especially within Punjabi diasporic and global Sikh communities) questioning notions of authenticity and authority.

Today, Sikh devotional music is sung in many languages, with diverse instruments, in various musical styles. Sikh reformists question whether these musical adaptations can be considered a part of Sikh kirtan when not sung in the original Gurmukhi and not upholding Indian musical aesthetics. (Dusenbery 1992) While the diverse styles often maintain a devotional focus, reformists emphasize the need for specialized modes of musical production to convey the Gurbani's soteric-aesthetic nature and bring about divine experience. The cultural diversity of the global Sikh community has added new complexity to the ideological environment where the popular and devotional realms continue to intersect affecting the reception and performance of Sikh music.

Still, the revival of traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan production illustrates a thread of continuity that has been sustained within India's musical production, which maintains aesthetic parameters connecting devotional intent to divine experience. The Sikh Gurus and authors of the Guru Granth Sahib express profound spiritual experience through music. A few extant memory-bearers have remembered the modes of musical production that the Gurus passed on to their devotees.

However, the democratization of the musical sphere has caused an eclipsing of oral transmission in favor of the recorded form. Thus the renaissance of traditional Gurbani Kirtan has been approached through various angles relating musical production to divergent notions of authority, authenticity, and Sikh subjectivity. While some work to recover the memory and diversity of past practices, others attempt to reform traditional practices by institutionalizing a normative Sikh musical identity. Although the diverse modes of revival have caused much debate within the field, throughout the worldwide community, Sikhs continue to seek the Divine and reaffirm Sikh memory and identity through the practice of Gurbani Kirtan.



Figure 4: Performing Gurbani Kirtan in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib on traditional instruments - from left to right: jori, pakhawaj, kirtaniya-ragi singer, taus, tanpura, dilruba. Photo taken by Keerat Kaur.

## Chapter 2

### Reforming Sikh Religious Identity

#### Introduction

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, India underwent radical change with British colonization and its attendant knowledge structures and discursive apparatuses, whose deeply imbedded nature continues to affect contemporary Sikh (musical) identity formation and its scholarship. British Imperialism started as an economic endeavor in 1612 when the East Indian Company set up trading posts on India's coastlines and grew into a colonizing mission (1757-1858) with India eventually subsumed under British rule (1858-1947). At this time, Britain emphasized the notion of *modernity* to create a truly "moral" nation. Key to modernity's success was scholarship through scientific methods that objectified knowledge through the written word. The value given to reason carried through to every aspect of life, which included how religion and their practices were perceived. This had far reaching effects on the way in which the multifarious Indic life-practices - including music - were analyzed, interpreted, and discursively transmitted. Early Orientalist scholars utilized their valued epistemological methodology to study Indian culture and systematically judge its evolutionary progress toward the modern ideal of reason and monotheistic religion. It therefore became the task of Europeans, responding native Indian elite scholars, educational institutions, and Indian nationalists, to reform performative identity practices for the evolutionary goal of modernity, from which Sikhs have not been exempt.

Under the guise of secularity, the Imperial authority attempted to "push India into modernity" by producing "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect."<sup>60</sup> In order to accomplish the task, the British created educational institutions that privileged the acquisition of knowledge through the documented written form. Many native elites became educated within this modern and essentially Euro-Christian framework, in effect grooming them into moral intellectual civil subjects of the British

---

<sup>60</sup> Utilitarian Thomas Babington Macaulay quoted in van der Veer 6.

colony. Through learning the language and the techniques of their colonizers, native elites also re-appropriated Europeans' pejorative classifications, terminologies and methodologies to reform their own subjectivity as moral citizens of an independent Indian nation, established in 1947. However, the two hundred years prior to independence had witnessed the molding of the Indian subject via performative practices and western discursive apparatuses. Therefore Indian devotional culture experienced a two-way force exerted from European Orientalists as well as native Indic scholars both promoting the goal of creating a moral and thus modern Indian nation through a mode of reason influenced by Western thought and Christian ideology.

This chapter illuminates the role that Colonialism and Enlightenment ideology have played in creating the modern moral Indian subject through Orientalist scholarship and its ramifications on contemporary Sikh subjectivity and practice. Problematically the appropriation of non-native ideologies and discourses has given authority to European models of representation as the *knower* over the *known*. (Said 1978) To illustrate the deeply imbedded nature of such discursive ideology apparent in the reform of Sikh-*i* (operative practice) into Sikh-*ism* (a normative World Religion), it will be necessary to highlight the way in which native elites appropriated Orientalist evolutionary ideology and religious discourse with regards to the Christian model of "religion."

Orientalist ideology placed monotheism at the height of religious evolution, while English philologist Sir William Jones found a shared Indo-European linguistic origin, thus promoting the notion of recovering a "pure" Hindu nation. Significantly, the process of recovering a "pure" Hindu identity was done in part by classicizing a "pure" Hindu national music through the apparatuses of "nation, notation, and religion." (Bakhle 2005) This process inevitably *othered* Muslim professional musicians, consequently affecting Gurbani Kirtan production where Muslim rababi musicians were ultimately removed from the Sikh musical realm in creation of a "pure" Sikh (musical) identity. Thus the 20<sup>th</sup> century Orientalist discursive ideology, received from the colonial encounter, informed Hindustani and Sikh musical reform

and continues to affect notions of authenticity and authority within the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary revival-cum-reform of traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan.

## 2.1 Orientalist Authority

The spirit of scientific exploration, so often seen as the hallmark of modern secularity, produces modern ideas of body and mind, of spirituality and materiality, of language and culture, of race, and of gender and character. In all these ideas, religion as the site of the nation is crucial.<sup>61</sup> (van der Veer 12)

The colonial episteme promoted the language of modern secularity, which privileged liberty, and equality as found through rationality, (van der Veer 8) while at the same time believing that “religion is a major source of rational, moral subjects and a central organizational aspect of the public spheres they create.” (van der Veer 53) This foundational colonial belief placed rationality within an evolutionary paradigm based on a monotheistic ideal, creating a hegemonic discursive framework within which all *others* became subsumed.<sup>62</sup> The Enlightenment episteme therefore defined the *modern subject* as *rational* within a secular state and *moral* when adhering to a monotheistic religion. This seemingly paradoxical concept that both rational secularism and moral monotheism define modern subjectivity has had lasting implications within Western academia and within Sikh scholarship in particular.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> While this dissertation does not directly address the issues of gender and race within the Sikh context, they nevertheless remain important factors, which I look forward to addressing in my future work. Gender: Female musicians continue to be excluded from the professional realm of Gurbani Kirtan, where women are not allowed to go to the vidyala schools that train ragis, and thus not able to sing at the Harimandir Sahib. (See Cassio 2011 and forthcoming in *Sikh Formations*) Race: Historically within India, access to knowledge has been determined by race, where the high caste Aryan-Brahmins were given the authority to recite and transmit the sacred Sanskrit language. The links between race-caste-knowledge has caused contemporary Sikhs to deny the authority of historically orally transmitted knowledge. Today Sikhi has spread outside of the Punjab with new adoptees, creating a “spiritual Diaspora,” thus questioning past power-knowledge structures in modern day.

<sup>62</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel “Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion” 1824, 1827, 1831 to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intrinsic nature of Hegel’s philosophy within religious and cultural studies.

<sup>63</sup> See Mandair (2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2009).

### 2.1.1 The “Orientalist Knower” and the “Oriental Known”

The hegemonic nature of the colonizer-colonized relationship enabled Orientalist scholars to use their own discursive methodologies to define “normality.” (Foucault 305) Thus within colonial India, monotheistic morals and secular reason were deemed the *normal* or *normative* standard while all others were classified as *abnormal* and thus transgressive. Edward Said (1978) appropriately describes such scholarship as the placing of the “Oriental objects” on a “stage” to be studied classified, defined, and analyzed by the “objective” Orientalist scholar from their privileged transcendent position.<sup>64</sup> (60) The politics of translation between cultures plays a key role in creating the transcendent position of the *knower* over the *known*. The rational scholar is thus afforded the ability to transcend the uneasy temporal subjectivity of lived experience in an attempt to categorize and organize the *known* “other.” In other words, the rational-modern-moral subject replaces the transcendent position of God as the authorial origin creating the “illusion of the modern subject,”<sup>65</sup> separating the self from the other, the scholar from the object of study, the *knower* from the *known*, the religious from the secular, and inevitably tradition from history. Problematically then, the modern subject in reality becomes ensnared within an epistemological closure,<sup>66</sup> within the illusion of a fixed and constant subjectivity. Thus scholars have been given the authority to take a transcendent approach, reasoning that terms such as “religion” can be uniformly employed cross-culturally, assuming that equal translation between cultures is possible. (Mandair 2001, 62) In this way, the modern episteme supports the idea that scholarship can be conducted through detached objectivity, while in actuality it erases the difference inherent in any movement between self and other or orality and writing by assuming that one-to-one

---

<sup>64</sup> The contemporary Gurmat Sangeet reform has institutionalized Sikh music as an object to be defined, analyzed and to replace transgressive operative practices.

<sup>65</sup> Mandair 2001, 51.

<sup>66</sup> French postmodernist Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) deconstructs Hegel’s notion of *Aufhebung* (transcendence) illustrating how such an ontological movement is predicated on the notion of *differance* (the always-already passage between meaning and *aporia*.) Derrida recognizes how our current discursive episteme denies the notion of *differance* due to its being ensnared within a metaphysical *cloture* based on the Hegelian schema that re-presents a hierarchical logic of identity in an attempt to make the “end coincide with the means” or the “definition coincide with the defined.” (Derrida xx)

correlations between linguistic, religious, and cultural translations can be made.<sup>67</sup> In particular, the epistemological erasure of difference can be viewed as a “metaphysical violence” that assumes one-to-one translations are possible.<sup>68</sup>

The assumption that exact translation between cultures and languages is possible can particularly be seen with twentieth century Sikh reformists who, in an effort to create a modern Sikh theology (Sikh-*ism*) and keep Sikhs within modern intellectual history, substituted the indigenous notion of *gurmat* (acting in line with the Gurus teachings) with the theological notion of Sikh-*ism* as a monotheistic religion. In doing so, the lived reality of *gurmat* as an experiential path underwent an erasure. Thus *gurmat* was historically replaced with the notion of *Sikhism* that in turn is henceforth believed to have always existed as an indigenous and native concept. (Mandair 2005b, 5)

Sikh devotional music has not been exempt from the pervasiveness of modern reform that removes difference in the process of translation towards normality. A parallel erasure and metaphysical violence has occurred in the contemporary *Gurmat Sangeet* movement that appropriates the term “Gurmat” to evoke a sense that this form of Gurmat Sangeet (music in the Guru’s way) has always existed. Today Gurmat Sangeet defines a normative version of “traditional” Gurbani Kirtan practice based primarily on the codified word, assuming that there is nothing lost in the standardization of raags.<sup>69</sup> However, the “intangible” nature of the orally

---

<sup>67</sup> Graham notes that the skeptical historian as an “objective” observer has been given “...important value in modern Western thought, and increasingly so since Enlightenment. With scientific detachment have come... objectification of the world around us... The virtually endless replicability made possible by the printing press adds greatly to the sense of the reliability and objective neutrality of the written word.” (1989, 143)

<sup>68</sup> Mandair states: “cultural traditions such as the Indic have no exact referents for religion/God/theology.” Further explaining that “One cannot simply make such assumptions as “Sikh theology”...a metaphysical violence can be discerned at the heart of the hermeneutic...because the consensus over the existence of Sikh theology rests...on a failure to recognize a metaphysics that disguises the process of change and transformation as the continuity of Sikh tradition.” (Mandair 2005b, 4-5)

<sup>69</sup> The denial of erasure between the music and its notation maintains that the orally transmitted knowledge is a *pre-modern knowledge of pre-modern subjects*, and thus kept outside of scholarly discourse and “history”. The acceptance of false binaries such as modern and pre-modern continues to be



transmitted Gurbani Kirtan parampara resists modern reformist attempts to homogenize the musical practice into a normative genre. To further explain the embedded nature of Enlightenment logic within contemporary Sikh studies and Sikh practice, it is helpful to analyze how Orientalist scholars and native elite commentators translated the Sikh scripture along with its incumbent beliefs and practices within a Euro-Christian moralistic schema for a westernized audience.

### 2.1.2 Influential Indology

The first translation and exegetical commentary of the Guru Granth Sahib into English was done in 1869 by Ernest Trumpp, a German missionary theologian hired by India's Secretary of State. (Singh, Darshan xviii) Problematically, his translation and commentary in *Sketch of the Religion of the Sikhs* defined the monotheistic conception of God as the highest rational evolution of culture and religion. Trumpp's commentary thus confined Sikhi to a pre-modern pantheistic sect of Hinduism by stating that "we can distinguish in the Granth a grosser and a finer kind of Pantheism." (129) He based his conclusion on the belief that the Bani found in the Guru Granth Sahib did not fulfill the Christian definition of an Absolute Being where "a self-conscious spirit, endowed with a free will and acting according to teleological principles, seems never to have struck their minds...qualities are attributed to him, which are contradictory to each other, and which clearly show that they are to be taken in a pantheistic sense." (Trumpp 129) Such an interpretation illustrates Trumpp's embeddedness within the Euro-Christian framework, which asserts that the highest moral religion is one that incorporates *reason* and *monotheism*. Thus the ineffable and paradoxical nature of the bani's musico-poetic expressions could only be understood as a "lack".<sup>70</sup> Along with the perceived irrationality of Sikh ideology, Trumpp

---

replicated and inculcated in the contemporary revival of traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan through a mode of mimesis.

<sup>70</sup> Mandair states: "From the Western colonial perspective of translators such as Trumpp...this perspective on nonduality....came to be projected as a *lack* of a proper concept of God, a *lack* of ethical standpoint, and a *lack* of freedom in the religion of the Sikhs." (Mandair 2005b, 9)

interpreted the organization of the Guru Granth Sahib by raag melodic mode in which each bani is written as a non-system, reflecting the incoherence of the Sikh belief system.<sup>71</sup> In other words, Trumpp's infamous conclusion about the contradictory and non-monotheistic nature of Sikhi reaffirmed the Colonialist objective that they needed to both civilize and have authority over those cultures that were "lacking" a moral belief structure and an inability to properly "reason God" or else they would forever remain pre-historical, and denied rights as citizens of a modern moral nation.

In response to the Euro-Christian-centric scholarship of Trumpp, Orientalists more sympathetic to the Sikhs worked to translate the Guru Granth Sahib and its teachings as emotive "religious" expressions, but inevitably could not escape the already laid Orientalist discursive framework. Frederic Pincott in his 1886 essay "The Arrangement of the Hymns of the Adi Granth" specifically attacks Trumpp's commentary in *Introduction of the Adi Granth* where Trumpp states:

The verses of the different Gurus have been distributed into these fore-mentioned Rags, apparently without any leading principle, as hardly any verse is internally connected with another...by thus jumbling together whatever came to hand, without any judicious selection, the Granth has become an exceedingly incoherent and wearisome book. (Trumpp 186)

Pincott refutes Trumpp's claim that the Adi Granth is an incoherent book without an organizing principle by showing that the Adi Granth is in fact organized "in accordance with fixed principles" foremost by *raag*:

The characteristic peculiarity of Indian music is that it is based on the theory that each musical sound corresponds to some emotion of the human heart.

---

<sup>71</sup> The rejection of this emotive theme can also be seen in Hegel's thoughts about Indian poetry as expressed in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* "among the Hindus we find the most beautiful poetry, but always with an underlying element of utter irrationality: we are attracted by its grace and at the same time repelled by the sheer confusion and nonsense of it." (1824, 350) In *The Emergence of 'Sikh Theology'* Mandair confirms: "For Hegel art, the sensuous and pantheism epitomized the very reasons why Oriental religions had never been able to achieve the freedom of history." (Mandair 2005a, 261)

When any particular sound predominates in a tune, that tune is supposed to give rise to a peculiar Rag, or emotion. (Pincott 187)

Pincott accurately assess the importance of the raags' emotive aesthetic illustrating a recognition of the link between the *Bani* and *raag* to convey their spiritually experiential atmosphere. Mandair affirms the notion that the Guru Granth Sahib is based on a *devotional logic* (2012) that subverts Cartesian-based non-contradictory logic:

The ordering principle here was not in fact based on rational or intellectual principles but on a 'non-system' which emphasizes the primacy of mood or emotion related to particular raags as a necessary prerequisite for understanding the words of the hymn. What this indicates is that the original composition of these hymns by the Sikh Gurus may have been dictated by aesthetic sensibilities centered on mood/emotion as opposed to conceptual thought. (Mandair 2005a, 261)

This statement importantly recognizes the soteric-aesthetic symbiosis found in the shabds while also bringing to light a common problematic in modern day Sikh scholarship where the import of experiential knowledge has been superseded by rational, secular scholarship based on a re-appropriation of Orientalist discursive ideology in order to define a normative "coherent system" while erasing difference in the act of translation.

Max Arthur Macauliffe, an Irishman in the Indian Civil Service, also wanted to "make some reparation to the Sikhs for the insults which he [Trumpp] offered to their Gurus and their religion."<sup>72</sup> ([1909] 1963, vii) He criticized Trumpp for his inability to see the importance of the raag classification, which Trumpp had glossed over as *irrational* along with Trumpp's lack of scholarly fidelity by only including four of the thirty-one raags in his translation.<sup>73</sup> Macauliffe

---

<sup>72</sup> For more information see: N.G. Barrier "Trumpp and Macauliffe: Western students of Sikh history and religion" in *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, ed. Fauja Singh (New Delhi: Oriental, 1978), pp. 155-185.

<sup>73</sup> Macauliffe included raag transcriptions in western notation.

was a close associate of many Singh Sabha Sikhs who promoted the *Tat* (Pure) Khalsa ideal.<sup>74</sup> While his close association with these native elite scholars influenced the nature of his commentaries, Macauliffe recognized that an indigenous interpretation is essential in understanding a tradition. He criticized Trumpp for the fact that he “disregarded the traditional interpretations of Gyanis, or professional interpreters of the Granth Sahib, and prided himself on substituting for them his own generally inaccurate versions.” ([1898] 1999, 316) In this way Macauliffe recognizes the Orientalist tendency to look to Western scholars for a correct version of the “Orient.” While demonstrating his awareness of such Eurocentrism, his own bias is also illustrated in his statement that only an Englishman can properly translate Sikh scripture:

It is necessary for the translator of the Sikh sacred writings to reside for long years in India, and work with the assistance of the few *Gyanis*, or professional interpreters of the Sikh canonical writings, who now survive. It would probably be an exaggeration to say that there are ten such men in the world. Of these few or none is capable of giving an English interpretation. (Macauliffe [1909] 1963, vi)

While Macauliffe’s work is qualitatively different from Trumpp’s in that he recognizes both the authority of Guru Granth as well as its oral exegesis done by top Sikh scholars,<sup>75</sup> he nevertheless appears to reify the notion that only a Western scholar can translate, and therefore have the authority to interpret an Oriental text.<sup>76</sup> In this way Orientalist translations inherently

---

<sup>74</sup> Tat Khalsa ideals were promoted in contrast to Sanatan Sikhs who linked Sikhism with Hindu origins and practices. This group includes the Nirmalas and Udasis who were traditional supporters and patrons of Gurbani Kirtan but were removed from Gurdwara management by the Gurdwara Act of 1925, in an effort to “cleanse” Sikhi of its transgressive elements. Macauliffe was also advised by prominent Sikh scholar and Tat Khalsa advocate, Bhai Khan Singh Nabha who in 1898 wrote *Ham Hindu Nahin*, a formative Singh Sabha text emphasizing the Sikh tradition as a separate “religion” from the Hindus.

<sup>75</sup> However, Macauliffe only works with those Sikh scholars in the Tat Khalsa vein, questioning the absence of other interpretations.

<sup>76</sup> Mandair raises the important point questioning whether native scholars could then re-assess whether the translations have accurately portrayed Sikh thought: “if these experts [*Gyanis*] were ‘totally unacquainted with English’ could they adequately judge the valuation and wider import of the form and meaning given by Macauliffe ...” (2005a, 265)

erase the movement between the indigenous text and Orientalist interpretation because they “send the Western mind, not first to Oriental sources for correction and verification, but rather to other Orientalist work...a process that...forces the uninitiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications...as the *true* Orient.” (Said 67)

## 2.2 Native Reform

### 2.2.1 Singh Sabha: Sikhi(sm) and Moral Monotheism

The Orientalist works motivated *Singh Sabhas*, a group of Sikh intellectuals, mostly trained in the European educative model, to correct Orientalist conceptions of the Sikh Religion. These reformists rather than focusing on the importance of the personal experiential relationship that Gurbani speaks of, instead rigorously attempted to prove that Sikhism was its own distinct rational, moral, and most importantly, monotheistic religion. In doing so, they appropriated western definitions of religion in a concerted effort to create Sikhism as a World Religion, to be considered a distinct religion from that of Hindu Dharma within the censuses conducted by the colonial administration. (Oberoi 1994) Through a process of reform, the previously fluid nature of Sikh practice that included multifarious aspects of *sanatan dharma* (traditional practices and beliefs) were re-formed into a “pure” *Tat Khalsa* form of Sikh-ism with clearly defined “religious” boundaries based on the orthodox Khalsa minority.<sup>77</sup> (Oberoi 1994)

Prior to the colonial encounter, Indian languages did not possess an equally translatable word for “religion.” Rather than separating everyday lived experience from religion through superficial classifications - as attempted by the colonial agenda to serve as a smokescreen for Christian monotheism - the Indian notion of *dharma* (spiritually transformative path) or *panth* (moral collective of believers) seamlessly integrated lived and spiritual practice. (Oberoi 14) In this vein Oberoi acknowledges the profundity of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that states that

---

<sup>77</sup> This process parallels the contemporary Gurmat Sangeet reform that works to institutionalize a “pure” Sikh music genre.

“language plays a pivotal role in our construction of reality and the way we act on that reality.” (12-13) By understanding how Indic beliefs and practices resist the erasure imposed by the Orientalist notion of “religion,” we become more fully aware of the embedded nature of language within a particular episteme and the inherent politics of translation therewith.

Particularly, as Singh Sabha reformists painstakingly worked to define a “Sikh Theology”, later commentaries on the Guru Granth Sahib privileged the European model of rationale, thus marginalizing the import of the spiritually evocative effect of Gurbani Kirtan in *raag* as taught through the Gurbani Kirtan parampara.<sup>78</sup> Thus a metaphysical violence occurs when devotional practice is usurped by the modern notion of Sikh-*ism* where normative definitions have become deeply imbedded in the construction of the Sikh self, so much so that they overwrite previous practice and come to be perceived as innate and originary.<sup>79</sup>

The Bani Guru, both in its written form (enshrined in the scriptural Guru Granth Sahib) and in its musical performative form (sung in Gurbani Kirtan), was prescribed a transcendent quality as God’s revelation to man. The “Word as Guru” was therefore translated into Euro-Christian terminology as the “Word of (a monotheistic) God.” Consequently, monotheistic notions of transcendence were transferred throughout the Sikh belief system.<sup>80</sup> Problematically, this bifurcation between the self and God can be seen as problematic when Gurbani itself describes “revelation” not as an originary sacred sound substance that can only be accessed by

---

<sup>78</sup> Mandair states: “ontotheological schema will take priority over *raag*, so that in future *raag* will be treated either as a ‘mere super-scripture’ or non-intellectual adornment to the proper literary work, or as is still commonly thought, as no more than an identity card which ensures correct oral transmission from generation to generation.” (Mandair 2005a, 261-2)

<sup>79</sup> Seen in the contemporary institutionalization of an “independent” or “pure” Sikh musical identity, or Gurmat Sangeet “music in the Guru’s way.”

<sup>80</sup> Mandair (2005a, 2005b) explains the ways in which Singh Sabha reformists such as Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Khan Singh Nabha, and Bhai Jodh Singh defined the Sikh concept of *Ik Oankar* as “One Creator,” creating the notion of a transcendent God and therefore was taken as a clear indication that the Sikh belief system was indeed a monotheistic “religion.”

the elite, but instead as a personal, interior, formless, “intangible” (*nirgun*) experience where the *knower* and *known* are One; an experience available to all regardless of caste, creed, gender or language, and expressed through Gurbani Kirtan.

## 2.3 Modern Musicology

### 2.3.1 Recovering a Pure Musical Origin

A significant scientific finding in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Sir William Jones eventually impacted the moral modernizing mission of British imperialism by linking ancient Sanskrit and European languages with a shared original purity. India therefore became perceived as having stagnated in their ancient originary past and had failed to evolve like their fellow Christian Europeans. Therefore it was the task of the Europeans to show their ancient Indian relatives how to revive their “lost originary purity” as well as progress along the evolutionary paradigm towards the goal of a monotheistic, rational, civilized culture. Thus Orientalist discursive ideology worked under the assumption that “Christianity is the highest religious form in an evolutionary sense, although a contrary assumption is that one must get to the original source to find the truest religion devoid of later blemishes.” (van der Veer 111)

The promotion of an originary purity was furthered by the notion that all knowledge, including music, arose from a divine origin. In his classic 1792 treatise *On the Musical Modes of the Hindus* (OMMH) Jones states: “Every fine art is declared to have been revealed from heaven, and all knowledge, divine and human, is traced to its source in the Vedas.”<sup>81</sup> In this way Jones wanted to recover a past divine (musical) origin in modern day,<sup>82</sup> thus replicating the Orientalist discourse which assumes that Indian music has been caught within an originary religious

---

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Teignmouth 184.

<sup>82</sup> Janaki Bakhle recognizes that Jones “was interested not in modern music, Eastern or Western, but in the survival unscathed into the modern period of ancient forms...in identifying the music of India as that which belonged to a “hindu nation,” Jones was not making a claim for modern Hindu nationalism but designating a group of people from Biblical times.” (10)

stagnation. He gives the example of India's "inability" to properly develop a modern musical system; "Had the Indian empire continued in full energy for the last two thousand years, religion would, no doubt, have given permanence to systems of music invented, as the Hindus believe, by their Gods, and adapted to mystical poetry."<sup>83</sup> Following Jones, western musicologists commented on Indian music's lack of notation and theoretical framework and therefore saw it as their duty to act as "intellectual power brokers" to scientifically define the intervals of Indian scales and reduce Indian melodies to staff notation. (Farrell 2)

Orientalist scholars of the colonial era therefore promoted the notion that music needed to recover a lost "pure" Hindu origin to become truly classical, with notation as the key. (Bakhlé 10) Therefore music, like all facets of Indian culture, had to be controlled and subjected to the rigors of scientific inquiry. (Farrell 44) Western musicologists worked as intellectual power brokers to exert control over traditional musical theory and therefore used notation to bring Indian music into a coherent modern form of representation. (Farrell 4, 8) Additionally, these musicologists promoted longevity through notation recognizing the impermanent and "intangible" nature of orally-transmitted music: "The practice of so fleeting and perishable a science as that of succession of sounds, without a knowledge of the theory to keep it alive, or any mode to record it on paper, dies with the professor." (Farrell 22)

On the whole, Enlightenment ideology viewed written notation as the sign of a rational and modern nation, relegating oral knowledge transmission to an antiquated and pre-modern method.<sup>84</sup> However, Indian culture historically privileged the oral transmission of knowledge, rooted in a Vedic belief of the affective power of sound both spoken and heard. In order to bridge differing notions of authority and authenticity based on the oral and written word, the new class of native elites emphasized extant ancient Sanskrit texts as originary sources of authority devoid of later blemishes. The preservation of "spiritual" music in the "secular" sphere was

---

<sup>83</sup> Cited in Teignmouth 204.

<sup>84</sup> Due to modern ideology, the "orality of Hindu traditions was viewed as a "national" embarrassment for Indian scholars who were confronted with the comparison with the West." (van der Veer 120)



central to the nationalist endeavor of the Hindu elite who emphasized music's mystical experiential qualities along with technical proficiency. (Subramanian 62, 117)

By using the scientific rationale of the colonizer, the reformers allowed music to become objectified, captured and therefore preserved as a valid art form through musical notation. The fact that music was re-appropriated as an artifact to be objectified and collected exemplifies how music-as-notation too became a “facet of the scientific spectacle of Empire.” (Farrell 48) Using the reasoning of Western musicologists, Indian musical reformists worked to systematize and preserve music for its recognition as a “classical” Indian music. (Bakhle 66) The task for musical reformists was therefore to translate the ancient theory of India's orally transmitted music into a Westernized modern musical language, to prove its innate superiority as a “classical” music genre with its complex mathematics and scientific theory. (Bakhle 67)

### 2.3.2 Musical Reformists: Bhatkhande and Paluskar

It was through the influence of two native reformists in late 19<sup>th</sup> century that Indian music was effectively *classicized*.<sup>85</sup> Native musicologists, Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar worked to elevate Indian music's classic origin to a modern standard in creation of a Hindu national music, though both with divergent approaches. Ethnomusicologist Janaki Bakhle in her book *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (2005) identifies “nation, notation, and religion” as the driving forces in their reformist agenda. While Bhatkhande focused on codifying the raag scales into written notation, Paluskar emphasized the Hindu religion as the basis of an originary purity. Bhatkhande's efforts dealt with the public domain which privileged written access to knowledge through institutionalizing musical education, creating a system of notation, organizing intellectual gatherings and journal publications and creating a recorded musical history of Indian music. On

---

<sup>85</sup> It was the princely courts of 19<sup>th</sup> century British India, characterized by Janaki Bakhle as the “feudal modern” (21-25), who initially embarked on the modernizing initiatives, which started the process of systematizing and institutionalizing Indian musical education. (Subramanian, 108)

the other hand Paluskar looked to sacralize Indian musical performance by merging the traditional guru-shishya parampara with modern educational institutions. Both however worked under the assumption that “music itself was on the verge of extinction, either because it had lapsed into degeneracy or because it had failed to become adequately modern” (Bakhle 7) and therefore championed the use of notation to re-form the orality of Indian music into the modern written form.

### 2.3.3 Bhatkhande and Notation

Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, a secular musicologist, worked to define Indian “classical” music as a modern national art form. (Bakhle 7) He did so by standardizing an Indian style of notation codified in his six-volume *Kramick Pustak Malika*<sup>86</sup> (1910-1932) containing 1800 compositions of main raags from different gharana schools. Bhatkhande created a new system of codified raag scales including a new way to read, interpret, and learn the traditional orally transmitted compositions. He documented the major raags popular at the time by rejecting the previous *raag-raagini*<sup>87</sup> classification and instead organized the raags into ten modal *thaat* scales using the major *raag Bilaval* scale as “the foundation scale of our modern Hindustani music.”<sup>88</sup> (Bhatkhande 35) To better elucidate raag structure and movement, Bhatkhande illustrated their main components such as each raag’s *vadi* (dominant) and *samvadi* (semi-dominant) notes, their *aroh* (ascending) and *avaroh* (descending) scales, and gave an illustration of their characteristic *pakad* phrases.

Bhatkhande recognized the inadequacy of the western notation system to notate the raag scales and compositions. Raag scales are not fixed to particular notes but instead can begin from any note, where the notes are based on their relationship between the other notes in the scale,

---

<sup>86</sup> First published in Marathi in 6 vols. 1910–1932.

<sup>87</sup> Familial relationships of raags categorized by the raag-husband and raagini-wife and their offspring.

<sup>88</sup> The *thaat* scale classification was inspired by the first All-India Music Conference held at Baroda College March 20, 1916 where Bhatkhande delivered a paper “A Short Historical Survey of the Music of Upper India.” (Found in “Three Important Essays on Hindustani Music” by Joep Bor, 2006.)

with multiple *sruti* microtones in between. Because of this, Bhatkhande's notation system was "based on the syllabic script, in which the pitch is indicated by the first consonant of the note and the rhythm is set in simple graphic structure to visualize the division of rhythmic patterns." (Cassio 2011, 314) In other words, the notation, rather than giving a graphic representation of the distance between the notes instead dictates their names *sa, re, ga, ma, pa, da, ni, sa*,<sup>89</sup> placing them within their cycle's rhythmic *taal* phrasing.

Bhatkhande's simple and straightforward method for notating Hindustani music enabled a wider audience to access compositions previously held in the minds of master musicians. However, it also had the negative affect of imposing a regular time signature and removing the subtleties of raag ornamentation, causing the melodies to become uniform and simplified "to such an extent that all authenticity is lost." (Farrell 38) Therefore by trying to re-create a "purely classical" Indian music through modern methods, Bhatkhande's work can in a sense be seen as de-authenticating the music, removing it from its originary authority based on oral transmission and lived practice that enabled personal creativity and instead promoted standardized raag scales and skeletal compositional structures reducing any notion of difference to the same.

Bhatkhande's books have become the standard authority not only dictating how Hindustani raags should be sung, but also how all other North Indian raags should be rendered. Problematically however, the musical arena has historically been a diverse one where each *gharana*<sup>90</sup> lineage or genre has developed their own educational system, repertoire, terminology,

---

<sup>89</sup> Similar to the western naming of the notes *do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do*.

<sup>90</sup> Literally "of the home," the *gharana* tradition initially privileged the oral transmission of musical knowledge from father to son in an effort to effectively maintain their tradition's musical integrity as well as to secure their family continued patronage. The hereditary *gharana* musicians cultivated their own distinct styles within the framework of the newer *kayal* genre, with each *gharana* named after their region or founder: Gwalior, Agra, Sahaswan/Rampur, Alladiya Khan, Kirana and Patiala. (Wade 1984) Over time *gharana* pedagogy came to include the non-hereditary guru-shishya relationship, however it still excluded low-castes and women from musical knowledge. The exclusionary nature of the *gharana* systems bred secrecy and unequal access to musical knowledge and came to be a rallying point of resentment by the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century middle-class Hindu nationalist movement.

and performance style. (Cassio 2011, 314) As a result, modern Sikh raag forms have been influenced by the normative standard as explained by Dr. Francesca Cassio:

Part of the contemporary Sikh pedagogy also refers to Bhatkhande, although the Sikh Gurus' tradition has an older, peculiar system of *talim* (musical training), and their repertoire includes raags unclassified in the *Kramik Pustak Malika*... it was probably only after the partition of India in 1947 that they were included as part of the pedagogy of the Sikh Gurus' musical repertoire. (Cassio 2011, 315)

The shift from oral transmission to written notation through a process of standardization and institutionalization has had widespread effects. The purpose of oral knowledge transmission through the traditional teacher-student method (*guru-shishya parampara*) has been to ensure that the teacher can maintain the musical integrity and authenticity of their tradition where “the disciple reciprocates by committing to respect and maintain that musical knowledge, thereby assuring continuity of the musical tradition.” (Wade 1976, 4-5) Gharanas and other hereditary lineages thus were invested with the authority to maintain musical knowledge by orally transmitting their own authentic style.<sup>91</sup> (Wade 1976, 3) However with the advent of musical notation, the heritage musicians (predominantly part of Muslim gharanas) no longer controlled their performance spheres, enabling anyone to access musical knowledge through the continuous replicability of notation, while at the same time having the negative effect of creating increasingly simplified and standardized versions.

### 2.3.4 Paluskar's Religious Revival

Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, himself a musician, was taught through the guru-shishya parampara but did not agree with its strict, exclusive nature and instead wanted to standardize musical education. (Bakhle 141) Unlike Bhatkhande's secular reform, Paluskar used music for his own “Hindu religious pedagogy.” (Bakhle 150) The “Hindu-ization” of music for the creation

---

<sup>91</sup> Traditional musical pedagogic systems will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

of a “Hindu” nation purposefully *othered* the Muslim gharanas, predicated on the “belief that Islam and Christianity would destroy India’s true Hindu culture.” (Bakhle 146)

Paluskar worked to align music with the Hindu reform movements by opening up a music school in Lahore, a primarily Muslim state.<sup>92</sup> Here notation played a distinct anti-Muslim role of removing authority from what were perceived as Muslim musician’s “illiterate and debauched hands” due to the perception that Hindustani Sangeet’s “foundation in purity and classicism is rapidly disappearing.” (Bakhle 149) Paluskar was therefore commended by Hindu reformists for being “deeply committed to the renaissance of the principles and truths that form the basis upon which our *risihis* [sages] founded this music.” (Bakhle 149) Ironically, while promoting such anti-Muslim sentiments, musical reformists also stressed the modern ideal of equality, which notation would provide to both women and lower caste, but inevitably excluding those who were not Hindu and did not fit into the modern religious schema of an ancient and pure *Hinduism*.

## 2.4 The Muslim “Other”

Through the intervention of British colonial ethnographers, Hindu nationalists were provided the groundwork to retrieve a lost “pure” originary Hindu (musical) identity which they viewed as having been denigrated in the hands of Muslims. In doing so, they believed they could retrieve ancient Hindu musicality, which they perceived as having been corrupted by Muslim rule as expressed by Sir William Jones:

My experience justifies me in pronouncing, that the Moghols have no idea of accurate translation...that an European, who follows the muddy rivulets of

---

<sup>92</sup> Sikh musician-mystic virtuoso Giani Gian S. Almast learned from Paluskar in Lahore. He was the teacher of Maharaj Thakur Singh, a musical prodigy, Gurbani Kirtan master and reclusive saint. “*Irrespective of how Maharaj Thakur Singh sang, whether they were in raag, taal, heritage reet or not, it seemed at times that every word of his rendition is becoming alive. That he is focusing on every word as he goes, which is unusual.*” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Millis, MA, July 15, 2009.) Giani Almast was also the teacher of notable Gurbani Kirtan exponent Giani Darshan Singh Sohal. (I have had the pleasure of meeting with Giani Sohal and interviewing his son Dalbir Singh. I also cherish the multiple visits I had with M. Thakur Singh in Anandpur Sahib, whom I affectionately referred to as “Hazoor Pitaji”).

Muselman writers on India, instead of drinking from the pure fountain of Hindu learning, will be in perpetual danger of misleading himself and others. (Jones quoted in Teignmouth 181)

Orientalist scholars following Jones replicated this type of argument for the retrieval of a lost Hindu purity as is expressed by part-native ethnographer Captain N. Augustus Willard<sup>93</sup> in his 1834 ethnographic work “A Treatise on the Music of Hindusthan” who states:

[North Indian music] arrived at its greatest height during the flourishing period of the native princes, just a little before the Mahomedan conquest, and its subsequent depravity and decline since then, closed the scene with the usual catastrophe....At present most native performers of this noble science are the most immoral set of men on earth, and the term is another word for all that is abominable, synonymous with that of the most abandoned and profligate exercises under the sun. (Willard 28-29)

By contrasting the morality of Muslim musicians under Mughal patronage with that of Hindustani musicians previously patronized by Principalities, we gain a greater understanding of the way in which Orientalist scholars and subsequent native ethnographers appropriate colonial moral language to sacralize the Hindu nation and demonize the Muslim other as also expressed by Bhatkhande:

The rise of Muslim power in Northern India marked the date of the decline of all arts and sciences purely Hindu. The conquerors, we can easily understand, were no lovers or patrons of learning. During those unsettled times the progress of the study of the science or theory of music was bound to decline and, as a matter of fact, did decline. The practice, however, continued with more or less success until the time of Mahomed Shah, one of the successors of Aurangzeb. (Bhatkhande 1934, 20)

It was during the time of Emperor Mohammad Shah of Delhi<sup>94</sup> (ruled 1720-48) towards the end of the Mughal rule, that musicians trained in dhrupad, khayal, and qawwali, found

---

<sup>93</sup> Joep Bor refers to Willard (who had a British father and Indian mother) as being the first Indian ethnomusicologist.

<sup>94</sup> Khayal's popularity grew in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under Emperor Mohammad Shah's patronage. (Wade 1984, 6)

patronage in smaller princely states protected by India's new British rulers. (Wade 1984, Raja 2005) Up until the modern era of British rule, Muslim and Hindu music had a shared sonic domain of affective experience. However, through the intervention of the British, Hindu nationalists were provided the groundwork to retrieve a lost "pure" Hindu music, which they viewed as having been denigrated in the hands of Muslim ustads.

The need to "purify" music from being "contaminated" by Muslim musicians was also seen in the Sikh community where Muslim rababi professional musicians, who had served as devoted transmitters of Gurbani Kirtan since the times of the Gurus, were eventually banned from playing at the Harimandir Sahib by the newly created Gurdwara management committee (SGPC). This effectively removed a whole educated class of musicians from Sikh devotional practice, leaving fewer memory-bearers, musicians and teachers of the Guru's tradition. As a product of British Imperialism and its attendant Orientalist scholarship, 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century Sikh reform movements standardized a normative Sikh identity to be recognized as independent citizens of a modern Indian



Figure 5: Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian at his home in Chandigarh. Photo by author.

nation. The institutionalization of a Sikh religious and musical identity inevitably erased the inherent diversity that had existed in Sikh operative practices, particularly removing rababis from the Sikh musical sphere as expressed by Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian:

NK: *Did partition affect Gurbani Kirtan when many rababis migrated to Pakistan?*

B. Ashok S. Bagrian: *Ha(n), rababi tradition definitely has gone. Rababi tradition has definitely suffered, especially with the current fanaticism, not encouraging them. That is to do with the Brahmanic influence on Sikhs, not to accept any other. If your [Harimandir Sahib's] foundation stone can be laid by a Muslim, and when you pay respect or go before Guru Granth Sahib, you bow before a Muslim and even an Untouchable. Those banis are considered at One with Guru Nanak. And not allowing them to sing Kirtan - that is not in the Sikh tradition.* (Recorded interview, Chandigarh, Feb 23, 2012)

#### 2.4.1 The Expulsion of Muslim Rababi Musicians from the Sikh Musical Sphere

The partition of India in 1947 created physical and religious separation between the Sikhs and Muslims when the rababis migrated to the newly formed Islamic nation of Pakistan and were forevermore banned from singing Gurbani Kirtan in the inner sanctum of the Harimandir Sahib. Bohlman notes how “shifting national, physical, and political boundaries” create a partition between “difference and otherness” (1997, 250) which cannot be neatly merged into a unitary Sikh identity as is perpetuated within a nationalist episteme.<sup>95</sup> The historically integral role of Muslim rababi musicians who represent “the memory of a unified geographical Punjab” (Purewal 2011, 366) underwent a “cultural amnesia of difference” (Anderson 1991) within the *panthic* (communal) memory. Their Muslim status transgressed newly constructed religious boundaries institutionalized by the SGPC (Gurdwara Management Committee) and codified in the Rahit Maryada as stated by Bhai Gurcharan Singh:

---

<sup>95</sup> Sikh heritage musicians however disagree with the Gur-Sikhs aligning with any partition (linguistic, gender, class, racial, religious, or ethnic) because they recognize that the “Guru Granth Sahib certified three centuries ago that God is not monolingual and that revelation is not reserved for those of any particular community or race.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 274)



*The rababis were stopped from doing Kirtan. A long time ago the muslim rababis used to do kirtan. (Rababia noo(n) band kita kirtan. Rababia noo(n) Musalmaana da –bahot dayr pehla karde si.) - but fifty years earlier, the SGPC president stopped them from doing kirtan at Darbar Sahib. (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, New Delhi, Jan 14, 2011)*

Even though the rababis were marginalized through the process of institutionalizing a normative Sikh identity, Bhai Hari Singh (fmr. Head Ragi of Harimandir Sahib 1950) still recalls a positive and mutual relationship between the ragis and rababis employed at Harimandir Sahib before partition.<sup>96</sup>

At the time of partition, he remembers that members of the SGPC even requested the



Figure 6: Bhai Hari Singh at his home in Amritsar, April 28, 2011. Photo by author.

---

<sup>96</sup> Bhai Gurcharan Singh also recalls: “*There were a lot of good Sikhs who were very knowledgeable as well, the rababis would also bow in front of them. The rababis would speak highly of my father’s jetha. When they would sing in the Harimandir Sahib they would say you could hear from far away.*” (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, Jan 14, 2011.) Bhai Baldeep Singh also states “*They remember at the Manji Sahib Function, at Guru Ram Das’ purab. All the greatest rababis, they were all there. This was pre-partition India. They all sang there one after the other. And it was fierce competition amongst each other....*” (Recorded interview, Albuquerque, NM, July 4, 2013.)

rababis to stay in India, telling them they would be protected from the communal violence that would inevitably ensue.<sup>97</sup> Bhai Gurcharan Singh remembers a similar narrative of the Sikhs offering to protect the rababis during partition, which he attributes to a mutual love (prem).<sup>98</sup> Bhai Hari Singh states that it was not until after partition that the SGPC had officially ruled that rababis should not be allowed to play Gurbani Kirtan at Harimandir Sahib.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, he recalls that after partition five rababis did come back to India requesting re-employment, but the SGPC instead gave them employment at the Akal Takth rather than in the Harimandir Sahib.<sup>100</sup>

Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian also relays that his family patronized rababis within their household, with some rababis staying in Punjab, India after partition and themselves becoming Sikhs:

B. Sikander S. Bagrian: *We used to have at our house rababis and in our village [Bagrian, near Nabha], there used to be a daily routine of theirs. Asa di Vaar in the morning and rehras in the evening at our family Gurdwara.*

NK: *This was when you were growing up?*

B. Sikander S. Bagrian: *Until I was about 13 years old*

NK: *And then did they have to go back to Pakistan?*

B. Sikander S. Bagrian: *No, one family stayed back, until the 60s almost, with my father. Most of them became Sikhs and his family stayed here until death. So this type of music was there<sup>101</sup> ... [but] the early 50s was a period of time, after*

---

<sup>97</sup> Bhai Hari Singh, email communication, Nov 16, 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Bhai Gurcharan Singh, recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, Delhi, Oct 30, 2010.

<sup>99</sup> The Sikh Rahit Maryada was initiated in 1931 after the Gurdwara Act of 1925, and states that only Sikhs can play Gurbani Kirtan in a sangat. However, the Sikh Rahit Maryada was not officially finalized until 1950, after partition when the rababis were effectively removed from playing Gurbani Kirtan at Harimandir Sahib.

<sup>100</sup> Bhai Hari Singh conveys that the five Rababis who returned after partition were part of Bhai Lal's jetha. However, he notes that "Bhai Lal" was an alias used by Ashiq Ali who had a famous ancestor named Bhai Lal of Goindwal Sahib. In actuality, before partition Ashiq Ali was part of Bhai Muktiyar's jetha who the SGPC would send to perform kirtan in Pakistan Gurdwaras for Gurpurabs. (Email communication, Nov 16, 2011.)

<sup>101</sup> NK: *What were the names of these rababis?*

B. Sikander S. Bagrian: *Bhai Ghasita and the chap who stayed with my father was Bhai Nanak Singh.*

NK: *He was the one who stayed afterwards?*

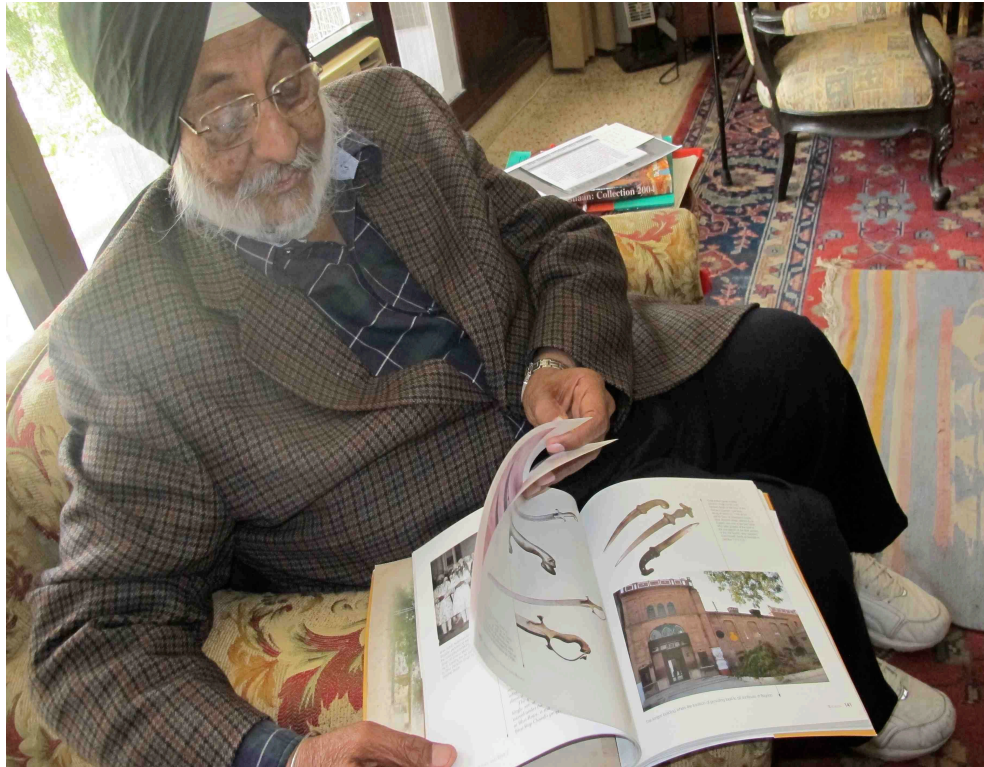


Figure 7: Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian sharing an image of the Gurdwara inside the Bagrian Fort from his book *Sikh Heritage: Ethos and Relics* (2012). Photo by author.

*partition, that the struggle for tradition was very hard, you know? So that is where we lost most of these things.* (Recorded interview, Chandigarh, Feb 23, 2012)

Even though there has been a tumultuous history between Sikhs and Muslims, it appears that in operative practice the Muslim rababis had been accepted and patronized as part of the Sikh community and even “were considered and respected as Sehajdhari Sikhs.”<sup>102</sup> (Trilochan 201)

---

B. Sikander S. Bagrian: *Ha(n), he died there in Nabha [in Bagrian village].*

NK: *And his sons didn't take on the rababi role?*

B. Sikander S. Bagrian: *No*

(Recorded interview, Chandigarh, Feb 23, 2012.)

<sup>102</sup> A *Sehajdhari Sikh* is a loose definition for those who may participate in Sikh operative practices but not subscribe to the orthodox ideology. They can be defined as Sikhs who have not been baptized by taking *Amrit*, do not follow the Khalsa codes of conduct, but may participate in Sikh devotional practice and subscribe to its belief system, thus may be defined as “slowly adopting.”

Sikh historian, Dr. Trilochan Singh further explains:

(1) There still are countless Muslim devotees of Guru Nanak. Before the partition of India, Muslim Bards who inherited musical talent, regularly performed Kirtan (Hymn singing) in the Harimandir (Golden Temple) and other Sikh Shrines. As most of them were expert in playing music on the Rabab (a musical instrument dear to Guru Nanak) they were generally known as Rababis. They were considered and respected as Sehajdhari Sikhs.

(2) It is quite possible that many Sehajdharis may drift towards the religion in which they were born, just as the Muslim Rababis have become after being completely cut off from the Sikh community, when they migrated to Pakistan. (Singh, Trilochan 201-2)

While many remember positive communal relations between the Sikhs and Muslim rababis, with “religious” lines often blurred through shared devotional practices, contemporary normative narratives are often disparaging towards the rababis. They portray the arrogance of 16<sup>th</sup> century rababis Satta and Balwand<sup>103</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century rababi Bhai Lal who was said to wash his mouth after singing the music of the “kafirs.” Bhai Gurcharan Singh also relays the complex arena of identity negotiation by telling a story about the very famous (*Bahot Mashoor!*)<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Rababis Bhai Satta and Balwand infamously refused Guru Arjan’s request to play at his daughter’s wedding citing their desire to be paid more, which caused Guru Arjan to also invest Sikh kirtaniya-ragis with the role of performing Gurbani Kirtan in the Sikh sangat. Nevertheless, Guru Arjan accepted Bhai Satta and Balwand back at court, and their Gurbani hymn is enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib in *raag Ramkali* pp.966-968.

<sup>104</sup> Other famous rababis that Bhai Gurcharan remembered included rababi Bhai Tabba of Amritsar, Bhai Nasira who played the jori-pakawaj, and Bhai Lal who was very popular and had a beautiful voice. (The contemporary rababi Bhai Lal took the same name.) (Bhai Gurcharan Singh, recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, New Delhi, Jan 14, 2011)

Rababi Bhai Chand<sup>105</sup> who, when asked if he had faith in Gurbani, responded that his faith in Gurbani was as much as the Sikhs have in the Quran.<sup>106</sup> The Sikhs found such statements, along with the fact that the rababis would eat *halal* meat and chew tobacco, as representing a conflict of values. Cases of communal violence also occurred<sup>107</sup> questioning the positive recollections of Sikh ragi – Muslim rababi relations as expressed by those I interviewed, when compared to some of the negative contemporary narratives that are disparaging towards rababis. Do such differences reflect the disjuncture between lived operative practices and normative ideologies, which deny past examples of religious plurality to support modern agendas of religious identity formation? (A prime example being the official post-partition removal of the rababis from performing Gurbani Kirtan at the Harimandir Sahib, promoting a “cultural amnesia of difference.”) Or does the removal of the rababis relate to colonial era reform and

---

<sup>105</sup> “Bhai Chand remembered a lot of bani. His style of singing was unique and different. He would sing in parts (tor tor ke). He was a really popular rababi. Bhai Santa, a rababi, learnt from Bhai Sain Ditta, the father of Bhai Desa Singh. Bhai Santa learnt in a Vidyala at Yateem Khana (Amritsar). Santa’s father was Bhai Ganga Chand he taught at Tarn Taran. Ganga sent his kids to that school [Yateem Khana]. The teachers were really talented and skilled, they knew puratan reets, and traditional styles. They had a jetha at Darbar Sahib. They worked hard and practiced a lot. These brothers they would sing in high notes. Bhai Chand and Bhai Santa would challenge each other.” (Bhai Gurcharan Singh, recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, New Delhi, Oct 30, 2010.)

<sup>106</sup> Bhai Gurcharan Singh, recorded interview, Jan 14, 2011.

<sup>107</sup> An extreme case being when Head Ragi of the Harimandir Sahib, Bhai Sundar Singh (1892-1937) was killed when he went to do kirtan at a Gurdwara in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood of pre-partition Pakistan as recalled by Bhai Gurcharan Singh: “Some Muslims accused him of singing “kafir’s” bani and so they killed him... Everyone was scared to sing again, but a kirtan darbar was organized to bring everyone together. We [our jetha] went, I played tabla... the Muslims also came to hear, we were all really friendly...” (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, Oct 30, 2010.) Bhai Sundar Singh was a student of rababis Bhai Atra, Bhai Moti and Sikh ragi Bhai Uttam Singh. He died after leading his jetha to a program in “a Phalia tahsil (subdivision) of Gujarat district (now in Pakistan), where a Gurdwara had suffered mob violence in which one of the officiants had lost his life. The Muslims of the area who formed about 80 per cent of the population obstructed the Sikhs entering the village. In the attack they launched, one Bhagat Singh was killed on the spot and several others seriously wounded, among them Bhai Sundar Singh. Bhai Sundar Singh was removed to the civil hospital at Gujrat where he succumbed to his injuries on 17 June 1937. His dead body was brought to Amritsar and cremated on 18 June.” (<http://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/arts-and-heritage/musicology-and-musicians/sundar-singh-ragi>) Referencing: 1) *Khalsa te Khalsa Advocate*. Amritsar, IQ. June 1937, 2) *Khalsa Sevak*. Amritsar, 21-23 June 1937.

(post)partition identity politics that necessitated the creation of a national Sikh identity, though having unforeseen consequences of erasing part of Sikh history and memory.

When looking at the socio-historical realm of Sikh devotional practice we see a continual process of identity negotiation, influenced by various epistemological apparatuses, which cannot be subsumed into a neat and totalizing narrative of loss and recovery. Bhogal similarly recognizes:

The complexity and hybridity of social relations and movements beyond signifiers over-determined by the foreign category of ‘religion’, point towards a much richer scenario on the ground, where multiple and contrary allegiances exist that show the reading of loss and separation as merely one among many. (2011, 240)

In her paper “Sikh/Muslim Bhai-Bhai? Towards a Social History of the Rababi Tradition of Shabd Kirtan” (2011) Navtej Kaur Purewal recognizes the messy lived interaction between social practices and normative religious ideologies, where the case of the rababis perform a mode of “boundary crossing” (367) between identities, towards a “dis-identification”<sup>108</sup> not bound by national nor religious ideologies. Therefore the nationalist agenda, while attempting to protect Sikh identity, at the same time perpetuates a “cultural amnesia of difference” erasing the disparate histories and identities inherent in the Sikh tradition into a continuous narrative as *Sikhism*. When normative definitions are implemented within the Sikh political arena and psyche, social and political rights are stripped from those not conforming to such definitions as can be seen with the removal of the Muslim rababi memory-bearers from the Sikh devotional sphere.

---

<sup>108</sup> Mandair uses the term “dis-identification” as an “alternative space for thinking about the history of religions otherwise than the dominant “world religions” approach – a space that would be more in tune with the postcolonial diasporic struggle for *dis-identification*...that refer[s] to a critical space that allows one to think at the limits of established pedagogical disciplines, as well as to a critical subjectivity that is more attuned to the task of creating a postcolonial and postnationalist global diasporic Sikh imaginary.” (Mandair 2009, 207)

### 2.4.2 Authorizing a Normative Sikh Identity

Central to the Sikh purifying agenda was the *Gurdwara Act of 1925*, which defined a normative Sikh identity based on Khalsa orthodoxy. This Act removed the *Sehajdhari Mahant* scholars and *Udasi* ascetics from Gurdwara management because they were seen as abusing their power, and replaced them with a management body - the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC) - that could only be run by orthodox Khalsa-Sikhs. Unfortunately, this had the negative effect of removing those Mahants and Udasis who had served as dedicated patrons of oral knowledge - including Gurbani Kirtan - since the times of the Gurus. While the first generation members of the SGPC management committee maintained a high level of aesthetic integrity with regards to Gurbani Kirtan patronage, as an elected body of officials, it was soon thereafter dominated by political agendas. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011) Without the patronage of traditional forms, the memory of heritage Gurbani Kirtan diminished within the Sikh panth. As stated by Dr. Purewal:

The rababi tradition of kirtan no doubt benefited under the former private mode of kirtan rather than the latter public one after the creation of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* of 1925 and its gradual extension and enforcement in managed gurdwaras of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee. Kirtan performance became streamlined into a modernist form bereft of the depth of its historical musicality. (376)

The Sikh Rahit Maryada establishes a normative code of conduct for the performance of Gurbani Kirtan. In Chapter V Article VI it states that “*Sangat Vich Gurbani Kirtan keval Sikh hi kar sakda hai*” (In the sangat, Gurbani Kirtan can only be done by a Sikh).<sup>109</sup> This declaration along with the current SGPC edict that only *Amritdhari-Khalsa Sikhs* are able to perform at historical Gurdwaras including the Harimandir Sahib, illustrates a conscious shift in the Sikh mentality as to who is authorized to perform Gurbani Kirtan. Nijhawan states that due to the “nationalization of Punjabi politics and politicization of religious boundaries” (180) the rababis

---

<sup>109</sup> [http://sgpc.net/rahit\\_maryada/section\\_three\\_chap\\_five.html](http://sgpc.net/rahit_maryada/section_three_chap_five.html)

along with all non-Khalsa Sikhs have been effectively removed from the Sikh arena, leaving them bereft of any social or political recourse.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

British colonialism imposed western Euro-Christian ideology and scholarship onto the Indian sphere through translations by Orientalist scholars under the assumption that systematic definitions could be employed to demarcate the vast array of Indian belief systems and practices into specific religious categories. This proves to be especially problematic with South Asian belief systems when “a number of the received dualisms of Western theology, philosophy, and social theory...do not seem to prevail with South Asian cosmologies and conceptual logics...[there is actually] fundamental non-duality.” (Dusenbery 390) Even with this glaring contradiction, Sikh scholarship has re-appropriated the dominant Western discourse, and accordingly has become subsumed under dualistic terminology.

---

<sup>110</sup> A recent court case *Gurleen Kaur vs. State of Punjab* (2008-2009) has defined normative Sikh identity based on the Khalsa model. In this court case the Punjab & Haryana High Court ultimately upheld the SGPC's choice to deny Gurleen Kaur, a *Sehajdhari* (slowly adopting) Sikh, admittance into an SGPC run Medical College due to her shorn hair by finding that “maintaining hair unshorn is an essential component of the Sikh religion.” (Singh, Gurtej 127) Section 48 in the court records decrees: “From a collective perusal of the provisions of the Gurdwara Act of 1925, it can safely be concluded, that retaining hair unshorn is an essential requirement for a Sikh to be entitled to claim the least of the rights referred to under the Act. A ‘patit’ i.e., one who does not maintain his hair unshorn, has not status or right therein. This clearly brings out the importance of unshorn hair for the Sikh religion.” (Singh, Gurjot 153) As the court verdict affirms that only *Khalsa Sikhs* have political rights within the panth, the act of producing rigid definitions inevitably excludes lived practice as is expressed by Kanwar Sandhu, a *Hindustan Times* journalist in his piece “Rigorism over Reality” responds to the court ruling: “The new definition [which defines any person born a Sikh but has shorn hair as a ‘patit’] means that all those who believe in the Sikh Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib and perform ceremonies as per Sikh traditions but are not baptized and also who trim hair, beard or eyebrows, are ‘patits.’ This *inter alia* creates only two categories of Sikhs – baptized Sikhs (khalsa) and Sehajdhari Sikhs. Though this may not have been the intention, but by its definition, which has been endorsed by various Sikh religious bodies and institutions, the SGPC has with one stroke excluded from the Panth nearly 70 per cent of its cadre.” (Singh, Gurjot 247)



Native elite scholars and reformists were not exempt from the mimetic logic based on transcendence and origins that underpinned colonial rule. While the Indian population was being classified according to their advancement towards a monotheistic ideal, native reformist groups, trained under colonial rule, emerged in an attempt to ensure that these newly imposed definitions and codifications would represent their communal interests. However, rather than contesting this inaccurate representation of the multifarious Indic groups, the native reformists in turn re-appropriated the subjugating Euro-Christian moral model of religion.

Our modern discursive system has been trapped within an epistemological closure based in a logic of identity that assumes that equal translation between cultures is possible. While Sikh scholarship cannot escape from being enmeshed within (post)colonial discursive ideology and its identity politics, it is through recognizing its embedded nature and attempting its deconstruction that allows a new image to appear. Such an argument does not imply that modern Sikhism is wholly or solely a product of such ideological apparatuses, but that it continues to be affected by the metaphysical violence inherent in the discursive language used to interpret, translate, and define Sikhi today.

The Singh Sabha's process of institutionalizing a corporate Sikh identity can be compared to the contemporary revival of traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan that are being re-formed into a normative *Gurmat Sangeet* to be institutionalized as an independent "Sikh" musical genre from Hindustani Sangeet. Today the codified written word - through musicological texts and notations - is given authority over oral memory, thus creating normative definitions and erasing the plurality of musicalities within Sikh devotional practice. In this way "the project of modernity has built into it an imperative of uniformity" through such agents as "the printing press and educational institutions," (Oberoi 129) effectively removing those aspects of traditional practice that are perceived as problematic or transgressive in the creation of a normative "Sikh" musical identity. Such erasure has caused a "cultural amnesia of difference" within the Sikh psyche that forgets past musical practices and the plurality inherent within.

The next chapter will investigate those near-forgotten aspects of traditional Gurbani Kirtan production that have become overshadowed by reformist identity politics and changes in musical patronage. Although much was lost, it is the guru-shishya parampara and its pedagogic methodologies that enabled the tradition to be successfully transmitted over centuries and remembered by some to this day. Those remaining memory-bearers are working to preserve and revive the traditional modes of practice as a counterpoint to the reformist apparatuses that continually attempt to homogenize the tradition into a purely “Sikh” musical genre.

## Chapter 3

### Gurbani Kirtan Parampara

#### Introduction

This chapter is an ethnographic study of the memory of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara passed down orally over generations since the Guru era. Historically Gurbani Kirtan compositions were honored as part of the Gurus' "intangible"<sup>111</sup> heritage and their memory-bearers were heralded as their trusted guardians. However, the last century has witnessed significant loss within the genre, in large part due to the British colonization of India. Colonial era reform movements resulted in the socio-political homogenization of Sikh (musical) identity by stripping diversity from Sikh operative practices, specifically with regards to the loss of Muslim rababi musicians from the parampara. Additionally, shifting patronage structures no longer supported knowledgeable *vidwans* (master teachers) nor their guru-shishya educative processes causing a loss of their "intangible" knowledge. Within a paradigm where orality dominates, it can take one generation to forget orally transmitted knowledge. In order for such knowledge to survive, it must be taught, learned, and imbibed.

Today there remains a dearth of those who have studied the Gurbani Kirtan parampara. Although a great amount has been lost, those few remaining have spent the last twenty years working to preserve, reconstruct, disseminate, and thus revive the parampara's pedagogic methodology that teaches ancient *shabd-reet* (Guru's Bani set to music) repertoire, raag forms, classical instrument playing, luthiery, and voice culture, etc. As attempts are being made to revive the historical parampara genre, Gurbani Kirtan is also being approached through modern interpretation and standardization for its wide dissemination. However, this has had the negative

---

<sup>111</sup> The notion of "intangible" heritage is taken from Bhai Baldeep Singh, referring to the oral transmission, pedagogy, and performative expression of Gurbani Kirtan that cannot be fully expressed or preserved through the written (tangible) form. It is this "intangible" knowledge that lives in the memories and practices of what he terms as "living books". Thus the "intangible" knowledge of Gurbani Kirtan has to be taught, learnt, and imbibed in order to be preserved as part of the Sikhs' "intangible" heritage.

effect of homogenizing the genre, while also rejecting past aspects linked to the Gurus' courts while simultaneously misattributing others to their authority. Questions of authority and authenticity continue to be raised when reviving an orally dominant genre and pedagogy in the 21st century.

Since the mid 20th century, Gurbani Kirtan has been systematically documented in the written and recorded form, however the “official” written record is only a fraction of what has been remembered with orality and memory continuing to be dominant factors in its transmission.<sup>112</sup> Due to the influence of modernity, it is a common Sikh perception that musical knowledge is only valid, authentic, and authoritative when recorded in tangible forms such as books, notations, recordings, etc. Thus when reviving an “intangible”-cum-tangible form, varying notions of orthopraxy can be promoted depending on where authority is invested; whether it be in the Guru Granth Sahib, in the Sikh sangat, in one's teacher, musical lineage or its memory-bearers, in an educational or governmental institution, in one's personal experience, or personal assumptions. These fundamental differences in authority investment affect how authenticity is constituted within Sikh practice and affect notions of subjectivity. This chapter will describe the underlying discursive, performative, pedagogic, and ideological apparatuses within the Gurbani Kirtan parampara. Does the pedagogic process of the parampara differ from the modernist mode of repetition that creates an “exoticized” or “museumized” version of the past as an object separate from the self? (Bohlman 256) Or does it instead enable “past” musicalities to become embodied within the self (Bruns 1992), thus creating more expansive subjectivities?

---

<sup>112</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh explains: “*Were notations made in the past? Yes, but of a particular way. I can prove with my grandfather's diaries, notated with text written on a certain character where the sum [beginning of the rhythmic cycle] comes in a cross [+]. Some notes on the shabd text itself are written, but not sectionalized as taal. That is how masters hear and make notations, not mass publications, things within lineages. Enough was written and oral which ensured tradition and knowledge was passed on generation to generation. They crafted arrangements. Methodology was enough to ensure tradition sustained itself in manner.*” (Recorded Interview, Albuquerque, NM, July 6, 2013)

Memory plays an important role in maintaining oral heritage, even though as an “intangible” medium, it is often criticized as being unreliable. Therefore, similar to archaeology, the process of excavating memory requires the necessary skills and tools to interpret traces of the past and reconstruct them so they may act in the operative present. (Kerby 23) Merleau-Ponty explains the goal of memory reconstruction as follows:

To remember is not to bring into the focus of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past; it is to thrust deeply into the horizon of the past and take apart step by step the interlocked perspectives until the experiences which it epitomizes are as if relived in their temporal setting. (Kerby 22: Quoting Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception* 22)

While some scholars have focused on the orally-transmitted parampara as an attempt to recover a Divine “sacred sound” origin,<sup>113</sup> I will instead illustrate how it is more productive to look at how the pedagogic methodologies of the parampara teach a particular logic that allows one to analyze, understand, remember and reconstruct the heritage shabd-reet repertoire over time.<sup>114</sup> Rather than being viewed as an anachronistic desire to recover a past musical identity or origin(al event)<sup>115</sup> and reproduce it in the present, instead I will demonstrate how this repertoire is key to understanding the parampara’s underlying devotional logic<sup>116</sup> that ultimately disrupts

---

<sup>113</sup> This notion will be discussed later in this chapter in relation to Bob van der Linden’s mimetic logic that focuses on the notion of a divine origin.

<sup>114</sup> Many shabd-reetes are recorded within the two volumes *Gurbani Sangeet Pracheen Reet Ratnavali*, by eleventh generation exponents of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara Bhai Gurcharan Singh and Bhai Avtar Singh. These compositions were deemed “authentic” by Bhai Ardaman Singh Bagrian in the introduction to the two volumes, as well as in interviews conducted with Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian, Bhai Balbir Singh, as well as Bhai Amrik and Harjot Singh Zakhmi.

<sup>115</sup> The notion comes from Mandair 2009 and will be discussed later in relation to the mimetic logic used by scholars who question the authenticity of the Gurbani Kirtan tradition.

<sup>116</sup> I follow Mandair here: “What I mean by ‘devotional logic’ is one that operates with ego-loss as a natural counter to ego-construction. In this sense my understanding of devotional logic is totally incompatible with ontotheology which is grounded in the operations of an ego who delimits the very rules of thinking and therefore is geared towards the construction of ego-boundaries.” (Mandair May 2013, endnote #5. 3<sup>rd</sup> Sikh Studies Conference, University of Riverside, unpublished) Thus devotional logic “derives its authority as much from the central Sikh texts as from lived experience” and “allows agency/subjectivity to be part of its modus operandi (which emerges from a self-reflexive attitude to life and lived experience).” (Mandair 2013, 4. unpublished)

attempts to standardize Sikh musical identity. The parampara teaches the importance of musical skill to create a symbiosis with the “four pillars”<sup>117</sup> of *raag* (melody), *taal* (rhythm), *shabd* (Word-bani), and *chitt* (intent-less-ness) to embody the Bani Guru, for an experience of the Guru within the self.<sup>118</sup> The confluence of these elements can be found through an analysis of the shabd-reet compositions that convey the spiritual insight of the Guru’s Bani. Rather than linking authenticity and authority to an origin(al) “sacred sound” or transcendent authority, a composition can be deemed authentic when “emotionally appropriate, significant, purposive and responsible”<sup>119</sup> as exemplified by its symbiosis through the music, intent and Word. Authentic compositions then become authoritative sources for Gurbani Kirtan (ortho)praxis. Additionally, an authentic pedagogy based in an authentic logic is taught by an authority “a person with extensive or specialized knowledge about a subject; an expert”<sup>120</sup> who gives the student tools to analyze, sing, and create their own authentic compositions and authentic embodied expressions,<sup>121</sup> and thus themselves become an authority, a vidwan or living book.<sup>122</sup>

The Gurbani Kirtan parampara is a devotional practice that connects authenticity and authority with the ability to embody the Bani Guru within the self with the soteriological goal of deconstructing normative boundaries and transforming subjectivity from a self-centered (*manmukh*) to a Guru-centered (*gurmukh*). By exploring the role of traditional teaching methods based on oral transmission and musical memory, we can better understand how Gurbani Kirtan

---

<sup>117</sup> “Four pillars” is a term coined by Bhai Baldeep Singh.

<sup>118</sup> Intent, when focused on the Bani Guru, enables the internalized Bani Guru to become inculcated within the self, effacing the ego-self and simultaneously transforming ego-intent into an ego-less mode of intent-lessness.

<sup>119</sup> [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)

<sup>120</sup> [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)

<sup>121</sup> Authenticity when linked to emotion and experience challenges modern ideology that only grants authority to empirical evidence based on the scientific knower-known dichotomy.

<sup>122</sup> A *vidwan* is a person who has gained knowledge and experience (gnosis) through dedicated discipline, themselves becoming *living books* who are able to teach and share with others. (The concept of living books has been taken from Bhai Baldeep Singh)

and its practice inherently resists the institutionalization of identity imposed by 20th century reform.

### 3.1 Historical Practice of Gurbani Kirtan

Since the times of the Sikh Gurus (1499-1708) the heritage shabd-reet compositions created by the Gurus and their court musicians were valued as part of the Gurus' "intangible" spiritual and musical heritage. The shabd-reeets were sung to the accompaniment of rabab, saranda, taus and other *tanti saaj* string instruments.<sup>123</sup> As prominent Gurbani Kirtan musician and scholar, Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal argues: "Sikh Gurus set lyrical songs to raags and then not only sang them themselves to the congregation, but also had them sung by rababis and Sikh ragis under their patronage."<sup>124</sup> (71)

The Sikh Gurus' court musicians were honored and patronized for their ability to maintain this knowledge and share it with the sangat, further expressed by 11th generation exponent Bhai Gurcharan Singh:

The Tenth Guru was benevolent enough to bless the creators of raw [sic] bani with lakhs of rupees, ...the ragis would wear royal dress and according to the

---

<sup>123</sup> A 1903 publication "Guide to Darbar Sahib" illustrates the predominance of stringed instruments played by ragis and rababis at Darbar Sahib. "The chief instruments employed are: the *rabab* or rebeck, having four strings of gut, employed only to strike the keynote. The *dutara* and *chutara*, with two and four strings respectively: a kind of guitar somewhat smaller than the *rabab*. The above are used by rababis only and are played with plectrum or *jawa*. The *saranda*, used by the ragis only: an instrument with strings of iron or brass wire (sometimes of silk gut) and played with a bow. The *taus* or peacock similar to the above but larger, and with the figure of a peacock carved at the lower end. The *sitar*, a kind of guitar with iron or brass wire strings, varying in number from six to forty, it is played with the aid of a peculiar shaped finger-ring known as the 'mizrab' or striker. The *tambura* or mandoline with four strings, one of iron and three of brass wire: it is played with the right hand and emits a continuous note. The *tablas* or small drums for beating time, usually placed in pairs, the hands being employed to beat the vellum. A diminutive *harmonium*: the only wind instrument employed." (S.S. Ramgarhia 1903, 28. Cited in Madra and Singh. *The Golden Temple of Amritsar* photo #372.)

<sup>124</sup> It is important to note that, in interviews I conducted with Dr. Paintal in 2010-2011, he changes his perspective that the Gurus were skilled musicians and instead argues that as a historian, he has to look at the lack of historical written evidence proving that the Gurus had any kind of musical training. I will discuss this issue in later chapters dealing with the modern revival.

custom have golden bangles in the darbar of Sat Guru and Sat Guru ji displayed pleasure after watching them.” (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 68)

The musical compositions were safeguarded by the kirtaniya-ragis and rababis as part of the GurSikh’s “intangible” wealth. “In the old days you could use compositions as gold and silver, there were even dowry compositions, or musicians would be given land and villages. It is the realization of the value that brings the attitude toward the gift.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Soquel, CA, January 2006)

Starting with Guru Nanak’s Muslim rabab playing companion Bhai Mardana, the Muslim rababis (lit. players of the rabab) were the only musicians patronized by the Gurus’ courts to relay the Gurus’ bani to the Sikh sangat until the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev instructed the GurSikhs to also take on this role. It is at this time that “many other GurSikhs also started reciting kirtan besides rababis” establishing a new class of Sikh *kirtaniya-ragi* musicians. (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 25)

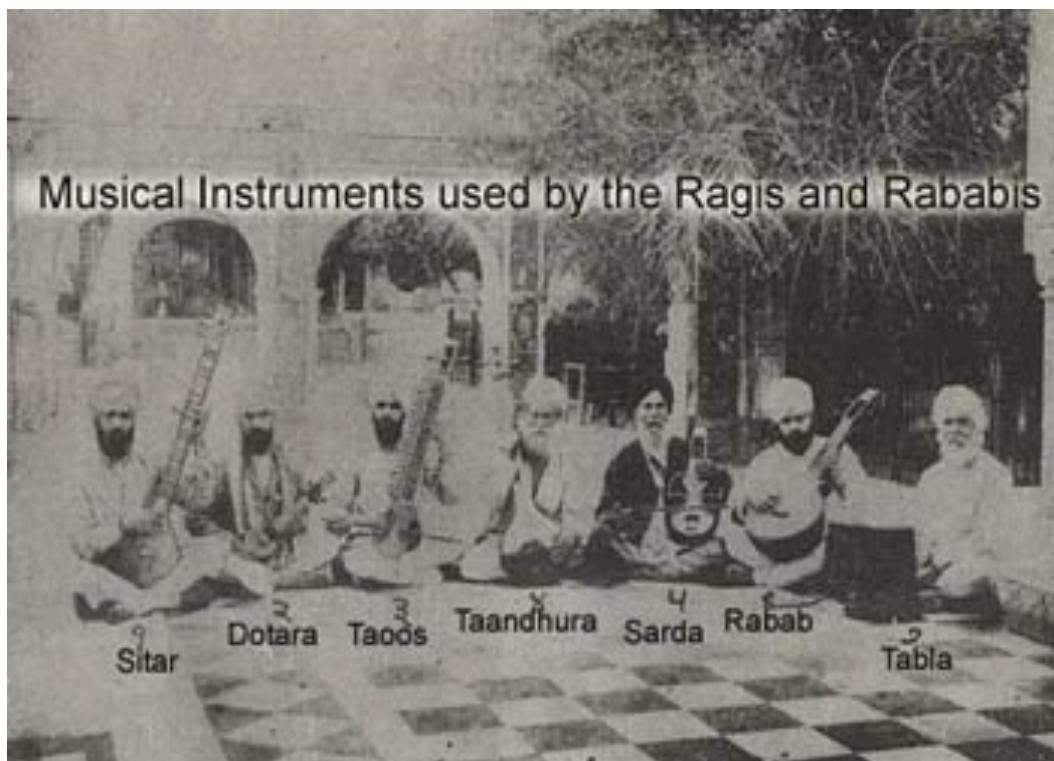


Figure 8: Musical instruments used by ragis and rababis.



The Muslim rababis and Sikh kirtaniya-ragis remained the primary memory-bearers of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara, patronized by the Gurus' and royal courts, until colonial era reform worked to establish a "pure" Sikh identity by excluding "non-Sikh" elements. Particularly, the 1947 partition of India and its ensuing communal violence caused the remaining Muslim rababis to migrate to Pakistan, resulting in rababis being a near-extinct group of Gurbani Kirtan musicians. Nevertheless, Bhai Hari Singh (who started playing at Harimandir Sahib in 1943 and became its Head Ragi in 1950) expressed the historically central role of rababis, recalling that up until 1947 the Sikh ragis would play the morning *chaunki* (musical session) at the Harimandir Sahib and then the rababis would take over from noon until night.<sup>125</sup> This fact is also recorded in an early 20th century book on the Harimandir Sahib that additionally recognizes how the kirtaniya-ragis and rababis were equally placed in a position of honor and authority, seated to the right of the Guru.

On the left-hand side of the Granthi [seated behind the Guru inside the Golden Temple,] sit pujaris, and on his right hand the musicians...the latter are hereditary ministrants grouped in 15 parties, who relieve each other at stated intervals. They are two classes-eight parties (known as ragis) being Sikhs, and seven (known as rababis) being Mahomedans. The former are on duty till noon, and the latter after noon. (S.S. Ramgarhia, 1903)

Up until the 1947 partition, the Gurbani Kirtan parampara flourished as a heterogeneous community of practitioners and memory-bearers. However after partition it was again homogenized in 1950 with the institutionalization of the modern *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (Sikh Code of Conduct) which states that: "a) Only a Sikh may perform Kirtan in a congregation."<sup>126</sup> Prior to the Sikh musical heritage losses caused by colonial era reform, Gurbani Kirtan had remained diverse and resilient. Even through socio-political upheaval and battles with the Mughal Empire, Gurbani Kirtan is remembered as being safeguarded by the Sikh Gurus and continued by the GurSikh musicians.

---

<sup>125</sup> Singh, Bhai Hari, recorded interview, Amritsar, April 28, 2011.

<sup>126</sup> Chapter 5, Article VI. [http://sgpc.net/rahit\\_maryada/section\\_three\\_chap\\_five.html](http://sgpc.net/rahit_maryada/section_three_chap_five.html).

All the Ten Gurus were perfect in music and were great kirtaniye... During the ferocious battle on the banks of Sirsa river, Guru Gobind Singh ji listened to kirtan of Sri Asa ji di Var from Bhai Daya Singh [of his Panj Piyare] which goes to show [the] importance given to reciting and listening to kirtan by the Ten Gurus. (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 30-31)

Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi (Head Ragi at Darbar Sahib at the time of the interview in 2011) similarly affirms:

*The Gurus played traditional kirtan, on saranda, taus, tanpura, rabab. In the field of battle, they [would] have the kirtan Asa di Var. Although we are in the struggle and battle we should remember God, we should praise him... Sri Maharaj would sing in raags in [the] battlefield. First we should sing the kirtan and then go to battle. Such an affection for kirtan, but we have lost all this.* (Banarsi, Bhai Narinder Singh, recorded interview, Amritsar. April 24, 2011.)

During times of conflict and religious persecution, Gurbani Kirtan has been remembered and lauded as bringing the *Miri* (temporal) and *Piri* (spiritual) realms into harmonious union. Sikh studies scholar Owen Cole further recognizes that Gurbani Kirtan was given the authority of Piri realm while the *Khalsa Panth* (collective) held authority over the Miri realm. Then in 1873 the Singh Sabha reform heavily shifted authority solely to the tangible form of the Guru Granth Sahib. (58)

### **3.2 Defining Authenticity and Authority within the Parampara**

Since India's Colonial Era (1858-1947), the written and recorded forms of Gurbani Kirtan have become privileged as authentic sources of knowledge, thus questioning the authority of the oral transmissions of the guru-shishya parampara. Because of this, knowledge gained through oral transmission and held in memory has become subject to great scrutiny for its limited access, power-knowledge dichotomy, and subjective nature. Today, the knowledge held by vidwan memory-bearers is being contrasted with modern written and standardized sources. Such dissonance has created much debate within the contemporary renaissance regarding notions of authenticity and authority within Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy. Questions are particularly raised

with regards to the authenticity of the musical memory held by the Gurbani Kirtan parampara who claim to remember and sing musical compositions of the Gurus themselves, along with other vintage compositions that may not conform to modern standards.<sup>127</sup>

### 3.2.1 Exploring the Validity of Orally Transmitted Knowledge

Today the authenticity and veracity of orally transmitted musical knowledge and memory continues to be raised by those questioning the Gurbani Kirtan parampara's claims of being able to remember and sing musical compositions of the Gurus themselves, along with other hundreds of years old compositions. They question the validity of the parampara's orally-transmitted memory, when at times it does not conform to modern standards and normative prescriptions that dictate: 1) Gurbani Kirtan should always be sung in the raags "prescribed" by the raag heading written in the Guru Granth Sahib, 2) these raags should be sung in those forms standardized by the Raag Nirnayak Committee in 1991, and 3) that experientially expressive words such as *Ji* (Honored One), *Wah!* (Awe Inspiring!), and *Piyaaree* (Beloved) should not be added when singing Gurbani Kirtan as they are not written in the Gurbani.<sup>128</sup>

Modern definitions place authoritative "Truth" in the written, recorded, tangible Word. However, Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy* (1982) explains how oral-based traditions hold different perceptions about what constitutes "truth", "time", "knowledge", as well as the nature of the "self", which was not privatized but viewed as a public, communal being. Through writing and particularly print, the author and reader have become privatized within their own sphere of internalized consciousness. This privatization has created a closure around the written word as definitive, complete, consistent, and true. In contrast, the orally-transmitted Gurbani Kirtan parampara bases notions of authenticity and authority on the resemblance to a predecessors works, illustrating a mode of knowledge transference built upon the ability to memorize, repeat, and create a work "fitting the traditions of the ancestors." (Ong 132, 42) Literate-centric

<sup>127</sup> For examples of the debate see both Facebook Debates in Appendices.

<sup>128</sup> These normative prescriptions will be discussed in Chapter 4 and 5.

cultures, on the other hand, privilege individual ownership, creativity, and originality via the written word. Since those from the predominantly literate episteme question the authenticity and veracity of orally transmitted memory, it becomes helpful to understand the brain's capacity and ability to receive, store and reconstruct information being transmitted.

### 3.2.2 The Power and Authority of Memory

Within the teacher-student (*guru-shishya*) educative process, teachers repeat the same thing over and over until the student is able to recite it back as accurately as possible, to the teacher's satisfaction, whether in the moment or in future renditions. The use of repetition within the parampara is not limited to musical instruction, but also occurs through storytelling and lectures. Through the oral pedagogic process, traditional knowledge is constantly re-enunciated, re-repeated and re-remembered within the self where it becomes categorized into a hierarchy of concepts, based on years of training and experience. These memories become stored as abstract categories that are then re-collected in the process of remembering.<sup>129</sup> (Jourdain 165) As Jourdain argues, "the result is a flexible hierarchy of concepts that can generate not only memories of actual experiences, but also novel combinations of concepts." (166) In this way, musical memory gained through learning enables both the recall of learned concepts and compositions as well as newly inspired creations. Repeated learning and practice can be understood as enculturating a *habitus of listening*<sup>130</sup> remembered and embodied within the self. Rather than being a limiting force, learning creates a great reservoir of information that can be accessed and used either when singing extant composition or creating new ones.

---

<sup>129</sup> The visual cortex is used for categorizing imagery, where musical compositions are sometimes "seen" or "felt" rather than "heard," while the audio cortex plays the primary role in musical memory as it categorizes sound memories. The temporal lobe then collects all of the diverse representations to be stored in long-term memory. (Jourdain 166)

<sup>130</sup> Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu coined the term *habitus* to refer to a person's subjective disposition towards particular tastes as being determined by environmental factors. Judith Becker (2004) furthered his notion with the term "habitus of listening" to connote how an individual's response to a particular musicality is triggered by biological or social predispositions.

Due to the prevalence of discourse surrounding notions of authenticity and authority within the revival, particularly in relation to the Gurbani Kirtan parampara's claims to memory, I asked the late Indian music aesthetician, Professor S.K. Saxena the following:

NK: *Can tradition be taught? Can traditional compositions be carried down through the generations?*

Saxena: *Why not? It depends upon the quality of the teacher. If the teacher really knows his job and is patient he should be able to pass on anything, why not? Music is based on principles and every principle is meant to be understood, so it should not be impossible for [a] teacher to pass on tradition, why not? I don't see any reason. It all depends on the capacity of the teacher to analyze the tradition and to try to pass it on, in an intelligent way. Tradition cannot be imposed, that would be no good. What is needed is an analytical approach to the tradition. And the tradition should be able to talk to the people analytically. I don't think it would be impossible at all.* (Recorded Interview, New Delhi, February 5, 2012)

Professor Saxena's perspective links musical authenticity with the ability of a teacher to analyze the musical principals, and thus transmit that capability to their students, who in turn can reconstruct those principals within their own authentic musical renditions.

NK: *There are compositions that are believed to have been written by the Gurus themselves. People question whether they can be their compositions because they are all orally transmitted and there is no notation. This is what people argue. They say people like Bhai Baldeep Singh's family cannot have these compositions.*

Saxena: *Why not? It depends on the relation between the teacher and the student. If the relation is really intimate, and the pupil is receptive, then I do not see that it would be impossible. It would be possible. To transmit any kind of knowledge depends on two factors, the ability of the teacher and the receptivity and devotion of the pupil. It should be possible. Why not? And after all, Baldeep is a modern man, he is up with the present times, and he knows the compositions, so what is the difficulty? Even if the tradition is merely oral, it all depends upon whether the music has been passed on to the kirtan today in the right form and whether the pupil has been able to inherit.* (Recorded interview, February 5, 2012)

In the transmission of an oral heritage, it is not only the responsibility of the teacher to convey the musical principles to their students but it is also predicated on access to a knowledgeable teacher (*vidwan*) as well as the student's commitment to undergo the pedagogy,

to learn the repertoire, to practice and thus imbibe the knowledge being transmitted. In this pedagogic system the teacher-student relationship is significant.

### 3.2.3 Guru-Shishya Relationship: Questioning Hegemonic Authority

The teacher-student (*guru-shishya*) relationship plays an important role in the pedagogic process but is a relationship that has historically contained hegemonic knowledge-power and exclusionary dynamics as seen with India's *gharana* (male hereditary musical lineages) and specifically with the *vedic* (male-dominated priestly caste) systems as is expressed by Mandair:

*Vocal* transmission and aural reception maintain the proximity to the origin. Since the entire aim of the oral-aural tradition is to “imprint” sameness or ideality of the original sound on all minds that are attuned to hear this sound (those who possess the correct dharma), such proximity reinforces the boundaries of the listening community. Historically speaking, the continuity (sanatan) of dharmic boundary has been maintained through the rigorous institution of caste denominations (varna dharma) so that the boundary of those not privileged with correct birth/dharma cannot pollute the dharma of those privileged with the eternal sound. (2009, 351)

While the exclusive and authoritarian nature of “vocal transmission and aural reception” in the Brahmanic Vedic context causes us to question the nature of orally transmitted knowledge, the Sikh pedagogic methodology does not appear to promote an exclusive mode of knowledge transmission nor attempt to recapture a pure “sacred” origin.

It can be argued that the Gurbani Kirtan parampara promotes a pedagogy that teaches the student-cum-practitioner-cum-teacher to maintain an open mind, to allow the past (other) to pierce the present (ego), allowing past knowledge, as well as present lived experience and future possibilities that are always-already becoming, to sing within the self. In other words, the ideal of the educative process and learning from a teacher is to guide the self on a continuous journey of ego deconstruction, reconstruction and transformation. The intent is to relinquish attachment to an ego-centered (*manmukh*) perspective, and in turn inculcate a *gurmukh* perspective where

the student is not attached to a human personality, but instead remains “bound to the bani, not the one who brought me the bani.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, lecture notes, July 4, 2013)

### 3.3 Parampara Authority and Authenticity

To go *beyond the written word* Graham (1987) importantly recognizes that knowledge, particularly spiritual knowledge, is tied to authentic persons rather than authentic documents, which are only validated by the authority of a qualified teacher. (Graham 75) As in modern academic institutions, sources are deemed authentic and authoritative when deemed so by educated persons who have undergone a pedagogic methodology. While self-taught and innate geniuses exist, those people are rare. Most quality knowledge acquisition requires that the student spend time with a teacher to first learn how to learn, to then imbibe the information transmitted, while learning the necessary tools to assess information for its accuracy, authenticity, and authority. Although the role of the teacher is seemingly obvious for any type of education, musical or otherwise, modern Sikhs seem to hold a less straightforward correlation between musical training and affective expression due to the primary importance placed on the *bani* (Word), with the musicality (*Kirtan*) viewed as secondary. Additionally, the inclusive and non-mediated nature of Gurbani itself questions the claim that experiential authority is effectively gained by those undergoing the guru-shishya parampara and its pedagogic methodology.

#### 3.3.1 Authority of Authentic Experience

Gurbani Kirtan can be related to the *bhakti-sant*<sup>131</sup> movement that started in 14th century northern India, rejecting the hegemonic ideology that limited spiritual experience to being mediated by a priestly authority. Instead they taught that gnosis of the Ultimate Reality could be found by and within one’s own self whether it be a spontaneous act of grace (*nadar or gurprasad*), through meditation (*simran*) on the ineffable experience that resists naming (*nam*),

---

<sup>131</sup> See Vaudville 1987. “Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity”

or through devotional singing (*kirtan*). While devotional and meditative practices are taught as tools to center the mind on the Divine, it is believed that Enlightenment is ultimately attained by the Guru's grace.<sup>132</sup>

The notion of unmediated access to divine experience however becomes distorted in the modern era when, through the secularization of the religious, the ego-self replaces God as the head authority and the knower over the known. Such a standpoint promotes individual interpretation and immediate knowledge acquisition, as found through democratic accessibility, over the quality of gnosis gained slowly over time from undergoing a pedagogic methodology with qualified vidwans. Rather than acknowledging the importance of musical training for affective musical creation, modern Sikh ideology instead has demonstrated the tendency of near-rejecting traditional knowledge as elitist and almost unnecessary.<sup>133</sup> While dedicated musical training can be understood as enabling a “disciplined muting of mind” Bhogal cautions that it does not *guarantee*<sup>134</sup> inspired experience and their resulting musical expressions that arise from the transformation of subjectivity from being ego-centered –*manmukh*, to non-ego centered – *gurmukh*.

With the understanding that most experiences and their expressions are filtered through one's ego-perception of their past and present environments, soteriological tools such as Gurbani Kirtan can entrain a habitus within the self in an attempt to remove the ego-filter. In this way it becomes useful to question: What is the nature of the information being repeated and inculcated within the self? From which well is the water of knowledge being drawn? What is informing

---

<sup>132</sup> Bhogal (2012) notes how the “spontaneous” state of a non-ego centered *gurmukh* is available to a neophyte and a realized one where embodied “sovereignty” cannot be exclusively owned “as it is the potential birthright of all beings/bodies.” (861) In turn this perspective is also a “disavowal of elite learning and/or esoteric knowledge in favor of selfless-unknowingness.” (880)

<sup>133</sup> See the Facebook Debates in the Appendices for an example of these perspectives and how they are expressed.

<sup>134</sup> Bhogal (2012) recognizes that “a natural becoming of the body, free of the cultivated (ie, conditioned) delusions of the mind... can be approached (rather than guaranteed)” by a “disciplined muting of mind” through “music, meditation, breath, posture, ritual, and martial arts- the ultimate aim being to act without actor, and thereby ‘granting’ the self a paradoxical nonidentity of becoming “dead-while-alive.” (862)



one's habitus? From which lens is one perceiving? Is it informed by one's own personal preferences based on their own lived experience of their environment? Is it a viewpoint dictated by an external authority? Is it based on a vast library of intellectual knowledge without being informed by lived experience?

The Gurbani Kirtan parampara contends that it does not promote a limited, normative mode of tradition that attempts to impose an authority of rule through regulations and standardization. Instead it offers an open-ended praxis, as learnt through masterful vidwans, that is process and developmentally focused. In this regard, the parampara maintains that its pedagogy entrains a habitus of listening that recognizes, appreciates and enunciates the Gurbani through a creative symbiosis between the musical techniques and meditative expression. It does so with the ultimate aim of transforming Sikh (musical) identity toward one that is both spontaneous (*sahaj*) and spiritually sovereign (*gurmukh*).

### 3.3.2 Communicating Between Past and Present

In order to address contemporary perceptions that question the relevance of reviving a past musicality, I use interviews with those remaining elders who have undergone the Gurbani Kirtan parampara pedagogy or have witnessed its practice. These interviews illuminate how the parampara mode of tradition can instead be viewed as an ongoing mode of dialogue, where the past becomes affective in the present rather than merely an attempt to recover dead remnants of the past or a “bricoleur's debris.” (Bruns 198) Thus to “unearth [the past] from internment of the present,” I use quotations from knowledgeable elders as a mode of mediating the perceived distance of the past from the lived ongoing world. (Bruns 198) The effectiveness of communicating with the past in the present is noted by Bruns where “quotation is a mode of dialogue with antiquity which restores oneself to the life (that is, the company) of authorship.” (Bruns 198)

With the reality of change through time, rather than viewing the “return to authorship” as the restoration of an *origin*, it becomes more productive to look at the authenticity and authority of the educative process itself as a mode of communication that transmits spiritual-musical memory over time for the experience of a non-ego dominated subjectivity. By analyzing the pedagogic process, its underlying ideology, and the spiritual-musical expressions contained in the bani and sung in the shabd-reetes, we see the depth of scholarship needed not only to reproduce the soteriologically focused musical expression, but to allow it to evolve over time. In doing so we can better understand how and why the parampara claims that undergoing and experiencing the methodology teaches a particular logic of the parampara that enables the practitioner to learn from the past as well as to innovate, and create as part of an ever-developing process.

The parampara continually dialogues with the otherness of the past, thus emancipating itself from the modern apparatuses that create a “ruthless forgetting” and an “epistemological break with what ceases to make sense” or is “strange.” (Bruns 199) Tradition in this sense appears not to be a hermeneutic translation or interpretation of the past that leads to a neatly normative definition. Instead, this mode of tradition can be understood as learning from the past and having an openness to future innovations that does not reduce difference to the same but instead produces an *irreducibility of dif-fERENCE*.<sup>135</sup> In this mode of knowledge dissemination, music is passed down aurally-orally through repetition but also contains a methodology for innovative practice and ultimately for the removal of the self towards an alterity.

---

<sup>135</sup> *Irreducibility* is taken from Gadamer and *dif-fERENCE* from Heidegger, where an *irreducibility of dif-fERENCE* recognizes the inherent rift (*Unter-Shied*) when navigating between past and present, illustrating the anti-foundational nature of tradition that denies the “operations of an exclusionary logic...because what is shared is not an identity but a difference.” (Bruns 206) The movement between past and present is an ever-moving horizon not grounded in a logic of the same, but instead promotes the continual engagement with the difference of the past in the present. Although tradition initially teaches repetition, it then begins to difference itself upon each enunciation, enabling an ever-mobile horizon of creativity.

### 3.3.3 Gaining Authority from the Orally-Transmitted Parampara Pedagogy

The orally transmitted Gurbani Kirtan parampara relies on an educative process to carry knowledge forward from one generation to the next because “every new generation must re-learn the “intangible” heritage in order to re-live it.”<sup>136</sup> The teaching method has traditionally been centered on the personal relationship between teacher (guru) and student (*shishya*). Rather than relying on the impersonal transmission through printed or recorded media, this type of educative process is called *sina-bi-sina*, or heart-to-heart learning. In the guru-shishya parampara, the responsibility of the teacher is to convey the learning precisely and without compromise to their student, to sustain and transmit the knowledge and memory of the tradition from generation to generation.

As with any other highly certified educative process, there is an extensive amount of training involved in the Gurbani Kirtan parampara pedagogy as expressed by the Head Ragi at Harimandir Sahib,<sup>137</sup> Bhai Narinder S. Banarsi:

*This tradition comes to our mind by learning – like the study in school – then we get the proper degree of education. Just like in the traditional. We are the learner [Sikh] from the beginning.* (Recorded interview, New Delhi, April 24, 2011)

To learn the historical musicality and preserve the orally transmitted shabd-reet compositions from the medieval era requires focus, dedication and consistent time learning from a teacher to gain skilled expertise, also expressed by 11th generation exponent Bhai Gurcharan Singh:

As for the study of medicine, engineering or Ph.D., the students have to do a lot of labour, attend the university and take the help of college professors. So does the education of kirtan need a devoted life for getting expertise. In order to have the knowledge of music and theory of raag, one has to learn by heart Gurbani from Aad Bani and the Tenth Guru’s Dasam Bani besides the bani of Bhai Gurdas ji and Bhai Nand Lal ji.... To have full knowledge of partaals, dhunians, dhurpad, etc. and different composition with the taals and store them in mind is not an easy task. (47)

<sup>136</sup> Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Albuquerque, NM, July 2013

<sup>137</sup> Head Ragi at Harimandir Sahib at the time of interview, April 24, 2011.

The parampara promotes focus, dedication, repetition, practice and memorization to learn how to render all of the nuances of a raag, to evoke its “psycho-emotive” nature (Protopapas 2011), and then to merge it with the bani, all the while staying faithful to the composition that has been transmitted generation after generation to modern day. The memory-bearers whom I have interviewed consistently expressed that it takes years (even a lifetime) of dedication and hard work to fully learn the skills and imbibe the memory of the parampara.

*Who is a Kirtaniya? Kirtaniya needs to spend 20-25 years of intense learning - you must understand - the definition of a professional musician, a concert singer, is different from kirtaniya. A kirtaniya must remember... to first assimilate and imbibe tradition in total- of all that was left. It requires a comprehensive educative process... santhya (correct pronunciation) of the whole of Gurbani, raag and taal systems... [There has to be] time spent to become a kirtaniya. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded interview, July 6, 2013)*

Research has shown that the human capacity to retain a vocabulary for musical devices can be in the tens of thousands, with the “ten-year rule” often cited as the nascent amount of time need “to write worthwhile music after a decade of practice.”<sup>138</sup> The importance of spending an extensive amount of time learning from, accompanying, and imbibing the musical knowledge as taught by a qualified teacher was also expressed to me by Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi:

*In the previous time it was the proper way that one who want[ed] to learn kirtan, [would] do kirtan. He first of all [would] have a training for some years... The proper reciters [ragis], they take the training. In 50-60 years before [it] was the proper channel. One who wanted to be [a] ragi goes to the teachers and he learns the proper way, and after completing his training for 20 years, or how long he has - the time to make him proper – he [would] perform kirtan in their team [jatha]. He [would] accompany his teacher so he knows properly how he sings... Those reciters were prepared by learning after a long training.” (Recorded interview, April 24, 2011)*

---

<sup>138</sup> Research has also shown that a chess master can remember fifty thousand patterns. Such skill requires over twenty thousand hours of practice or 40 hours per week for ten years. (Jourdain 167-8)



Figure 9: Bhai Gurcharan Singh at his home in New Delhi, November 8, 2010. Photo by author.

Bhai Gurcharan Singh (ninety-five years old at the time of this interview) recognizes the important role of the teacher within the educative process, aural-oral knowledge to be passed down over centuries; he states:

*We sing it bar-bar-bar [again and again and again] with our elders. Then it stays in our mind, dimaag rakhiai [you memorize it], even when I was sleeping I would have it in my mind and I would fall asleep practicing {plays rhythms on his chest with hands}. [To remember a composition] ....from Guru Arjan's time, it is hard work to keep it in the mind, it takes work. You have to do swar riyaaz [note practice]. They used to practice by surt [concentration], dimaag [lit. mind, memory], kana [lit. ear, listening] and accordingly they would learn. Memory is very important. Memorization -, then you don't forget it. {he illustrates his point by singing a "bahot bahot purane," hundreds years old composition remembered by his family "Dropadi Kabir Madr"} Like the person keeps his money safe in a*

*locker or pocket... that is how we keep the repertoire.* (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, New Delhi, Nov 8, 2010)

Only after extensive years of practice does the parampara recognize someone as being a knowledgeable vidwan uniquely qualified to transmit and safeguard the musical *vidya* (knowledge) including the vintage shabd-reet repertoire. These compositions are remembered by the parampara as being authored in the Guru's Darbars and in some cases by the Gurus themselves, which they refer to as part of the Guru's "intangible" wealth.<sup>139</sup> While those trained in the Gurbani Kirtan parampara have been taught and remember these heritage compositions, others question the validity of such claims because they have primarily survived in the "intangible" form of memory.

### 3.3.4 Challenges to Notions of Authority and Authenticity in the Parampara

The Gurbani Kirtan parampara is a specialized field with only a few remaining memory-bearers to maintain and pass on the spiritually affective musical knowledge. Because of the "intangible" nature of orally transmitted musical knowledge, particularly up until the last century, along with questioning the reliability of memory, it becomes difficult to prove whether what is being sung is an "authentic" rendition or an altered copy. Such questions related to authenticity and the value of reviving traditional music have been at the root of debates between revivalists and reformists regarding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy.<sup>140</sup> These notions are particularly significant when claims are being made linking musical authenticity to the authority of the Guru's themselves. Bob van der Linden, a "historian-cum-musicologist" (2012, 247) questions any such claim that authentic Gurbani Kirtan can be revived:

Sikh scholars and musicians in search of authentic kirtan can only imagine what the music of earlier generations was like; one never knows that one is

---

<sup>139</sup> Bhai Avtar and Gurcharan Singh's two-volume set entitled *Gurbani Sangeet Pracheen Reet Ratnavali* "Music of the Guru's bani: Treasure-chest of Ancient Compositions" contains only shabd-reet compositions, which they themselves refer to as "the Guru's Jewels."

<sup>140</sup> See the Facebook Debates in the Appendices for an example of these debates.

hearing the original of any kind of music because it will always be related to something that precedes it...historically informed performers are not therefore really historical, but remake the past in the image of the present. (2011, 389)

With this statement van der Linden denies the authenticity and authority of oral pedagogy and its memory due to his historicist perspective that intrinsically defines authenticity and authority based on the “truth” of an origin(al event), identified by Mandair as a *mimetic logic*:

What comes after the origin(al event), the course of events regarded as “tradition,” is from the historian’s point of view contingent upon the truth of the origin(al event), and insofar, inherently doubtful, a false or pseudo-reality about which nothing can be affirmed unless evidence to the contrary is presented. (2009, 295)

The historicist obsession with linking authenticity to an origin(al event), that is only given validity when proven, is particularly expressed by van der Linden who asks whether the “Sikh Gurus were the only ones who sang authentically and everything sung afterwards by others would be simply interpretations of their music and words?” (van der Linden 2011, 393)

While I agree with van der Linden that anything enunciated after the origin(al event) will inherently be filtered and expressed through one’s own interpretation, rather than being predicated on an origin, perhaps the authenticity of the Gurbani Kirtan tradition instead can be found in the tools that teach the student how to repeat, remember, render, and gain insight into the parampara’s symbiotic use of musicality. Still, as a historian of empirical evidence and verifiable facts, van der Linden (2012, 249) uses a mimetic logic that requires the ability to prove the “truth” of an origin(al) event when questioning claims to authenticity made by Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011, 248):

Bhai Baldeep Singh believes that the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib are ‘revealed songs’ and that ‘a careful study of these compositions will bring to us the original nada (sacred sound) of the gurus, as they expressed them, and in this way the other bani (compositions of the Guru Granth Sahib), which has become silent may perhaps become alive again.’ (van der Linden’s translations)

While Bhai Baldeep Singh's statement "the original nada of the gurus" can be understood as a desire to recover a sacred sound origin, Bhai Baldeep has himself denied the notion that the pedagogic process aims at recovering a "sacred" origin.

*We don't consider it looking at past or being nostalgic. We are not trying to sing how the Gurus sang. We haven't even considered we can do that. I can only sing the way I can. The purpose of this educative process is to remember the ambit of scholarship and wonderment of that time which lead to the evolution of certain ornamentations, be it verbal, be it vocal...So when learning compositions of that time we are first learning vocal techniques prevalent at that time. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Millis, MA, July 15, 2009)*

Bhai Baldeep Singh goes on to elucidate that the purpose of the educative process is not to try to replicate an origin(al) past sameness in the present, but is instead to promote a systematic scholarship by faithfully rendering what is learned, attempting to not change the past knowledge that is being "quoted" (Bruns 1992) in the present.

*Our purpose when learning compositions remembered by rababis and Sikhs belonging to the Gurus is done with the scholarship that we don't change or interfere with anything. That is the scholarship. Like occidental universities and streams have a scholarship, ethics are there, we also have very strong ethics... So we are not under any nostalgia. We are not even trying to ape the Gurus. We are learning all that remains from the past for their aesthetical and symbiotical [sic] content. For their riches. (Recorded class discussion, July 15, 2009)*

While the pedagogic process teaches the student the ethics of replication when citing past musical sources, it also teaches the logic of the parampara enabling the student to create their own musical responses and thus appropriately evolve the musical genre. In this way, both the original musical compositions as well as the musical derivations are remembered, with great care taken to differentiate what is remembered as an original, from a predecessor's works, from one's own interpretation.

Rather than being a question of "freedom versus fidelity" to the original, musical replication can be understood as a mode of interpretation, in line with Walter Benjamin's notion of translation that "must – let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as



reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*.”<sup>141</sup> (Benjamin 79) Rather than prescribing to the notion that shabd-reet renditions can necessarily replicate or know the authorial intent of the Gurus, instead the Gurbani Kirtan pedagogy promotes the idea of harmony when training the practitioner to imbibe a mode of intent(less-ness) focused on the Divine Other. To carry out this task, the Gurbani Kirtan pedagogy maintains a four-point focus on the foundational pillars of *raag* (melody), *taal* (rhythm), *bani* (words) and *chitt* (intent or meditative focus) with the ultimate goal of embodying a spiritual-musical symbiosis within the self.

*The attitude has to be right.... You have to understand – what is kirtan. It is not a mere art form. It is not a Sunday morning activity. It is not a night-long activity that you just participate in.... Raag, taal, shabd, and chitt are 4 equal pillars. You have to obtain a balance, neither is the objective. Neither raag is the objective, neither taal is the objective, neither shabd is the objective, neither chitt is the objective. They are all your aids. They are all your aids. They are to aid your efforts. But where do you reach? It is a vehicle it will transfer you, piercing you, catapulting you from the mandal of Oankar [realm of form] to the mandal of Nirankar [formless realm] where neither raag exists, I repeat, neither taal exists, neither shabd exists, neither chitt exists. That is the objective. And after that communion, if ever you get a chance to express, [it] will be kirtan that will transfer anyone who will hear. Until then you are yourself awaiting transformation. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Knoxville, TN July 22, 2006)*

The perspective conveyed by the parampara, is that all four fundamentals are tools that train the musician to decondition the intent of the ego-voice to embody and experience the spiritually insightful bani through the affective musical elements of raag and taal. Such perception allows us to transgress notions of an originary “sacred sound” creating an openness toward future musical possibilities. By moving away from a discussion based on a search for an anachronistic Sikh musical identity or an originary authentic “sacred sound” substance, we can instead investigate the affective process of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara which manifests an

---

<sup>141</sup> The notion of creating a harmonic identity enables an identity based in difference rather than a normative identity based in reproduction that attempts to subsume difference.

intentionality based on an ego-less space of spiritual expression with the understanding that “kirtan doesn’t make you a musician, it makes you a *sadhu* [mystic].”<sup>142</sup> In this way the goal of the pedagogy is to teach tools to entrain a uniquely sovereign Sikh subjectivity not bound by modern homogenizing tendencies.

### 3.4 Parampara Pedagogy: Soteric-Aesthetic Methodology to Embody the Bani Guru

As a *soteric-aesthetic* genre, the Gurbani Kirtan parampara is unique in that it does not only teach how to become a proficient musician, but how to efface the ego-self and become one with the Bani Guru.

The whole point of learning is to stop interfering with the song that already is – within. We think we need to learn, but actually we need to unlearn; all accumulated personalizations [sic] – that is exactly what one needs to de-personalize. Let the raag and shabd sing in the temple that one is. The experience of Gurbani Kirtan is in the realization that one is *kita* (done to) and not a *karta* (doer). In kirtan, a *kirtaniya* is a recipient and not the source.<sup>143</sup> The purpose of undergoing, one may say, the pedagogy of Gurbani Kirtan is to receive the ability not to sing, but to not interfere with the song that already exists. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 262-3)

Undergoing the pedagogy of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara is meant to be an ego-effacing process. The purpose of being a student, cleansing the voice, living a musical discipline, and learning nuanced musical technicalities, is to entrain an intent(less) meditative focus on the Bani to embody the Guru within the self. While it is important to be musically adept, the purpose of undergoing the pedagogy is to entrain the musicality within the self so it can be used, developed and even transcended.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded interview, Albuquerque, NM, July 6, 2013.

<sup>143</sup> This refers to the Sikh notion of *revelation* as coming from a non-ego posited subjectivity.

<sup>144</sup> This is not to deny the fact that one may have a spontaneous non-ego mediated experience and resultant musical expression. However, the question becomes what tools does that individual have to express? What informs ones expression? Bhai Baldeep Singh agrees that “*there is no doubt about that you can have your own absolute experience. But when we talk of Guru Nanak’s story, then anything to do*

### 3.4.1 Building a Soteric-Aesthetic Foundation

Students of the parampara are first taught the practice of *akaar* (singing an open “aah”), to find their own authentic and intention-less sound: “To praise and to sing, you need to discover your intentionless sound. You dress that purified sound with the true Word (Bani) to become the praise itself. Dead...within Him.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 1999, 67) Bhai Baldeep Singh was taught this practice by his granduncles who in turn were taught this by their father Baba Jwala Singh. As explained by Bhai Gurcharan Singh: “We would do ‘aah’ {demonstrates} on *sa kharaj* [the foundational note],<sup>145</sup> as long as we could do.” (Recorded Interview. Nov 8, 2010)

Bhai Baldeep Singh was not only taught this *akaar* practice within the parampara, but was also taught this by his teacher the late dhrupad Dagar-Vani exponent Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Dagar (1927-2011) confirming the foundational aspect of this practice within the ancient devotional traditions. “Akaar, the vowel *aah*, has been considered the first alankaar [aesthetic technique] of Nada Yoga.<sup>146</sup> Across traditions, the term *akaar* is commonly used and they all emphasize the importance of this sound.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication, Aug 26, 2013) This practice of singing on an open *aah* sound allows the face to be completely relaxed, thus creating a clear foundational voice removed from stylistic affects. It is through

---

*with Guru Nanak and Guru’s court, these bear evidence of that time. And they must be studied with that in context.”* (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Millis, MA, July 15, 2009)

<sup>145</sup> The foundational note “SA” (aka *kharaj* or *ghre swar* -home dwelling note) can be any note one chooses. (“SA” can be compared to “DO” in Western music (ex. do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do). The scale goes from there accordingly. Women usually start their “SA” on A or A-flat while the men’s “SA” usually is on C or C-sharp.

<sup>146</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh explains the importance of *akaar* as the first alankar fundamentals: “*More or less, it was agreed (amongst all traditions) there were twelve alankara-s (fundamental elements) within which the human capacity to express was classified. The progression was also logical. After analyzing the anatomy of vocal instrument, that is, of the human voice, the uccahran asthan-s (vocal points) were established, which were taalu (upper palate), jibhiya (tongue), danti (teeth), oshti (lips), mordhani (face or facial skin along with neck), nasika (left nostril), anunasika (right nostril) and nirannasika (where both nasika and anunasika are used). The three nasal points are said to correspond to the yogic nadi-s, ida, pingla and sushmana. A detailed study of the uccaran (musical expression) follows.... But why is akaar the only vowel sound included in the 12 vocal alankar-s? The reason, as I realized upon years of practice and deliberations with the elders including Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar, the first twelve alankar-s are nouns, as if, but each one of these have their own variants... all other vowels are a variant of akaar...*” (Email Communication, Aug 26, 2013.)

meditating on this sound *aah* that invites the Bani Guru to come (“*aao*” in Punjabi) and dwell in the clarity of the note.<sup>147</sup>

Traditionally, learning the notes of the raag is done by repeating the teacher’s enunciation, accompanied by the tanpura or another stringed instrument rather than plunking the notes on the harmonium, which is unable to accurately render a raag’s sruti microtones. Professor Kartar Singh<sup>148</sup> of the Gurmat Sangeet Academy in Anandpur Sahib expresses how he teaches his students the foundational practice:



Figure 10: Professor Kartar Singh teaching his students at the Gurmat Sangeet Academy in Anandpur Sahib, India, April 13, 2011. Photo by author.

<sup>147</sup> This insight was shared with me by Bhai Baldeep Singh.

<sup>148</sup> Professor Kartar Singh (b. 1928 in Ghumanke village in Lahore district of Punjab, now in Pakistan). His teachers include Giani Gurcharan Singh, Bhai Sunder Singh Kasoorwale, Bhai Dalip Singh, J.S. Bhanwra and Balwant Rai Jaswal. He has taught at the Malwa Central College of Education (1968-71), was Head of the Music department at Guru Nanak Girls College, Ludhiana, (1971-88), and now is the Director of the Gurmat Sangeet Academy in Anandpur Sahib (1999-current). In 2006 he participated in reviving the playing of stringed instruments at Harimandir Sahib. He has received many awards including: Shiromani Raagi, Bhai Samund Singh Memorial Award, Padma Shri Sohan Singh Memorial Award, and the Sikh Lifetime Achievement Award by the Sikh Directory in UK. Additionally he received Sangeet Natak Academy’s “Akademi Award” in 2008 and was made a Tagore fellow of the Akademi in 2012.

*First swar sadhana, sa – re – ga - ma, then aah – aah. Then they [proceed] slowly slowly... [for the] first half hour or more than that. Practice recite [sic] sa re ga ma, in mandar saptak, lower, middle, and upper octave. About half an hour morning definitely, and sometimes evening. And I recite just like we are sitting in a program... I recite one line and they follow me. I recite seven or eight beat and they repeat. Chaltaye – system goes accordingly. I practice through tanpura. Not harmonium. (Recorded interview, parts translated from Punjabi, April 13, 2011.)*

Bhai Gurcharan Singh also elucidates the importance of swar practice to build a strong foundation to be able to accurately render the notes of a raag.

*The old ragis would practice [raag] Kalyan at night and [raag] Bhairo in the morning. They would do swar riyaz (note practice) on these two raags. Then they would go up and down the scale, and then sa-re, re-ga, ga-ma {demonstrates} like this. Then sa-re-sa, re-ga-re, {demonstrates} like this. And sa-re-ga, re-ga-ma, ga-ma-pa, {demonstrates} and they would go up and down like this. This is how you create the foundation. The foundation of the house has to be strong then you can have many stories on top. If the foundation is kamzor (weak) you cannot sit on the top. Because of this it is important to build a foundation with the swar. You really get it in your mind. Twelve notes. There are also gaps in between each note, called srutis. When you do a lot of riyaz, there are three srutis between sa and re, and when you can touch them, then the raag becomes very beautiful. All of these things make you in tune and you won't be out of tune. Being out of tune is bimaar (sickness). If you are in tune then your mind will be able to {snaps his fingers} sing another raag, change the raag quickly. If you have the entire raag in your dimaag (mind), then the raag will appear in front of you. (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, New Delhi, Nov 8, 2010)*

The Gurbani Kirtan parampara teaches students to wake in the pre-dawn *amrit vela* to practice swar sadhana, first on akaar and then explore a morning raag scale by enunciating the names of the notes. Students are first taught to work on the neutral foundational voice and breath control to create a state of *sahaj* (equilibrium) within the self, and then are taught how to render the notes.

After spending a half-hour to an hour on this one note within the morning practice, the next step is to explore the notes around the foundational note paying careful attention to the entry into and exit from the note, while being conscious to breathe from the navel. The goal is to make

the *swar* (note) fluid, light, consistent and strong, like a wave coming smoothly in and out of existence, as a clean canvas on which to place the bani. Bhai Baldeep Singh recalls how Bhai Avtar Singh taught him to cleanse the voice of ego-attachments and dwell within the notes:

*My grand master taught me how to handle the notes and the words so they wouldn't crush the sound, the naad which carries them. "Ke beta, swar, ine hulkey ho jan, apne shabd," they should become so light that they do not crush the swar note underneath. "You wanted to be a jet fighter pilot, if you want to fly, what is going to carry you across is your song, and if your song doesn't defy gravity, how will you fly?" The gravity he spoke of were all the vices of maya, of bharam, of dukh, kalesh, pap, tap, santap, sara vikar.<sup>149</sup> "If your song doesn't defy gravity from all these, how would you fly?" (Recorded class discussion, Albuquerque, NM, July 2007)*

In addition to learning how to render the notes and raags, students are taught voice culture, note recognition, and rhythmic precision through *sargam* (musical scale exercises) and *teekas* (encyclopedia of raags).<sup>150</sup> Special attention is paid to maintaining the rhythmic cycle by clapping the taali while singing. The importance of rhythmic precision is further stressed by learning how to recite and play the standard *thekas* (rhythmic patterns) of each taal rhythm. Time and care is taken to ensure that students can accurately pronounce each word, memorize the bani, and understand the meaning before attempting to sing the compositions. All the while students are reminded that entraining the fundamental musical techniques enable those functions to become second nature so that the mind can maintain the necessary devotional focus. "Always

<sup>149</sup> "Illusion, doubt, fear, grief, sin, affliction, all the vices."

<sup>150</sup> There are *thekas* that have been remembered in the oral tradition and some of them have been recorded in Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh's *Gurbani Sangeet* (1970) (*Dev-Gandhari Bilawal ang* p. 220, *Bihag* p.248, *Kalyan* p. 900 and 901, *Bheem Dhanasri* p. 349) The thekas are done in many taals including: *Sul Phakta* (10 beats), *Jai Taal* (13 beats) as well as the more common *Chartaal* (12 beats) and *Teentaal* (16 beats) cycles. Bhai Baldeep Singh explains "*The tekhas, the systems of education are very unique, and these are not like the lakshan geets of raag (a composition where the raag is described in the lyrics), those are the lesser smaller one, two liners where they have little information. These are dhrupads. Those lakshan geets were done by masters in the later 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These are proper dhrupads. And they were not called lakshan geets, these are called thekas, encyclopedias. And they were huge classics, if you did not know the tekhas then you have not learned, they were like Ph.Ds at that level. Only the ones who were taught to be masters were given these, these were signs of that. That is why many who are student traditions, they do not have these, they were students of students, they are student lineages.*" (Recorded interview, Espanola, NM, July 12, 2011.)

remember the objective. Raag and taal are the wheels [sic], mind is the horse, bani the rider, *Akal* (Undying One) the destination.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Pebble Beach, CA, July 15, 2002)

After establishing a tuneful and rhythmic foundation, students are taught how to render the shabd-reet compositions. Attention is paid to the notes, their placement within the rhythmic cycle, and the musical structure of the shabds, all which work together to convey the experiential meaning of the Bani. Students are taught how to render the different musical structures including the four-part dhrupads with the *asthayi*, *antara*, *sanchari*, *abhog*,<sup>151</sup> the two-verse *do-pade*, four-verse *chau-pade* or eight-verse *asht-pade* compositions, the long *vaar* ballads, and the (usually) multi-rhythmed *partaal* compositions.<sup>152</sup> After learning how to render the musical compositions, students are taught the etiquette of musical performance, how to open a shabd-reet with an *alaap* on the open “aah” sound to invoke the raag followed by a *mangalacharn* prayer either reciting the words “Ik Ongkaar” “WaheGuru” “Sat Nam” or the salutation “Dhandaut Bandana”<sup>153</sup> setting the devotional intentionality on the Bani Guru.

#### *Shalok*

*Dandout bandan anik bār sarab kalā samrath.*

I bow down, and fall to the ground in humble adoration, countless times, to the All-powerful  
Lord, who possesses all powers.

*Dolan te rāko parabū Nānak de kar hath. ||1||*

---

<sup>151</sup> The four-part dhrupad structure within Gurbani Kirtan goes as follows: *Asthai* is the chorus, centered around the main thought, question, or desire, first played in *tha* single laya, doubled to *doogan* and then quadrupled to *chaugan* and *paki chaugan* upon each return. *Antra* is verse. *Sanchari* is the third stanza where *gian* (knowledge) is given, played in one-and-a half-paced *arkuar*. *Abhog* = is the ending often celebrating the attainment of *gian*, played in the triple *tigun* laya. Bhai Baldeep Singh explains the uniqueness of the Gurbani Kirtan tradition that plays *arkuar* during the *sanchari*, which he recognized through his own research, study, and analysis. “If it were not for the old repertoire, for my research, we would have never known what was played with the four parts of the dhrupad. Dagar Sahib doesn’t know, Hafiz Khan doesn’t know, Malik’s don’t know, none of these masters know. The biggest pakawaj names didn’t know. Why is it only in Punjab that whenever *sanchari* is played there is *arkuar* played?” (Recorded interview, July 15, 2009)

<sup>152</sup> *Partaals* are compositions created by Guru Ram Das and continued by Guru Arjan that have multiple rhythms that change throughout the different parts of the composition. However, there are examples of *partaals* that are all one rhythm, like the shabd “Mori Ahan Jaye” (SGGS 830) by Guru Arjan which is considered a *partaal*, but with every stanza sung in the same *chartaal* twelve-beat rhythm. (Discussed further in the following shabd-reet analysis section.)

<sup>153</sup> SGGS 256.

Please protect me, and save me from wandering, God. Reach out and give Nanak Your Hand.

Musical proficiency is taught in this method as a meditative technique,<sup>154</sup> to initially entrain the mind to focus on the musical mechanics as to not wander, with the goal of mastery over what is being sung and played so that the mind is no longer focusing on technicalities but on an intent(less) space of rendering the spiritually-emotive aesthetic of the bani.<sup>155</sup> Saxena describes the state when discipline leads to effortlessness as being in the flow where you are “no longer counting, a flow which is self-complete and self-completing where the mind is relaxed in self-abandonment, keeping measure incidentally and effortlessly.” (1979, 43) Rather than referring to the practice as “*riyaaz*” which “aims at a better presentation to the outside world” those dhrupad teachers refer to this practice as a “*sadhana*” that “aims at entering into the mysteries of song, at saturating oneself with the attitudes that make for self-improvement, and ultimately for the goal of music: liberation.” (Saxena 2011, 32)

The devotional intentionality of the *sadhana* can be recognized between dhrupad traditions, as expressed by Bhai Baldeep Singh’s grand-teacher Ustad Allabande Rahimuddin Khan Dagur<sup>156</sup> (summarized by Indian music aesthetician Professor Saxena):

Imagine a devotee hallowing the morning with svaras (notes) of the bhairava mode. Steadying himself with the basic sa (tonic), he sings to saturate himself with images and attitudes to suit the hour-the sun rising, yearning in prayer and chastening of self...non-attachment towards things of the world. A brief but sure touch at the tonic followed immediately by komal rishabh (“re” half-tone low) prolonged firmly and sweetly, at once blends the mind with the sunrise outside by suggesting effulgence....as attunement grows the aid of

---

<sup>154</sup> Singing Gurbani Kirtan is one meditative technique given by the Gurus to inculcate the Nam within the self which includes the foundational meditative practices of recitation (*paath*), repetition (*jap*) and meditation (*simran*).

<sup>155</sup> Jazz musician Parker explains the experience of embodying the music to a point that the body-mind is not consciously controlling: “It’s a bit like juggling...you have to do the easier tricks first: get into the rhythm and suddenly your body is able to do things which you couldn’t do cold. The best bits of my solo playing, for me, I can’t explain to myself...at a certain speed all kinds of things happen which I’m not consciously controlling.” (Borgo 51)

<sup>156</sup> Ustad Allabande Rahimuddin Khan Dagur is the father of Bhai Baldeep Singh’s teacher Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Dagur.



svaras, detachment deepens and the devotee cooperates by possessing the sa merely ideally and lingering repeatedly at the re, now softly, though sweetly—the note suggesting transcendence. There thus becomes a symbol of devotion and elevation of the self. (Saxena 2011, 32)

It is through such perceptive insight that the music transcends mere technicalities and becomes a transformative practice, also expressed by Bhai Baldeep Singh:

*Resonance is not just within, it surrounds, it spreads throughout every molecule. {Demonstrates a sargam<sup>157</sup> exercise in raag shud Bilaval,<sup>158</sup> in ten beats, Sool Taal.<sup>159</sup>} Singing this exercise with such resonance creates a state of sahaaj [equilibrium]. Until you have become one with your song, where the “you” has dissolved, it is not your song. Your true song will be, when every aspect of you is incorporated in the expression. Melt, don’t resist, this is it, this is what you need to melt in, this is how we need to be melted. As I once wrote, “the laya deconditions, the raag smelts, cast in the bani I die.” The laya is nature... People don’t even know what laya does, what rhythm does, it disintegrates, it breaks all the solids, accumulated, sedimented garb on us, deconditions. What is the nature of raag? Raag smelts, it melts you, it melts those smaller fragments, what is the cast? It is the sacred Word, the shabd, in which you get cast in the Bani, you die. You loose yourself within the greater Self and then it is only the greater Self that is. There is no conflict within. It is not that your intent exists and then the intent of the one diminishes, no you loose your intent and then it is only the intent of the One. It resounds within you. This is the science, methodology, journey, how you become One. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Albuquerque, NM July 2007)*

<sup>157</sup> “You must remember that in *sargams* we are just displacing the characters, the words, but not the intent....” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, July 15, 2009.)

<sup>158</sup> Sargam exercises are taught to explore the raag melody. Raag shud Bilaval is the *sampuran*, or pure form of the raag with no sharps or flats.

<sup>159</sup> Below is the notation for the first two lines of the raag Bilaval exercise. Above the rows are the taali-kali markings. The “X”, “2”, and “3” represent the claps and the “0” are the open counts. Below the taali-kali is the ten-beat cycle count. Below that is the *Sool Taal* theka which is recited and played in a fast *drut laya*. Finally at the bottom are the names of the melodic notes illustrating the movement of raag Bilaval, which is sung while clapping the taali, to the rhythmic accompaniment.

X	0	2	3	0
1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	9 10
Dha trikir	dhe ta	kai dha	din ta	ke nu
Sa -	Sa Re	- Re	Ga -	Ma Ga
Pa -	Ma Ga	- Ma	Re Re	Sa -

The practice of cleansing the instrument of the self through the voice so that the bani may dwell in a space of ego-less intent is taught to transform the roots of the ego-self through the continual practice of removing its instigating vices of illusion, doubt, fear, grief, sin, affliction, etc., to become the song itself.

The purpose of the pedagogic methodology of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara is to build a solid foundation on which to construct a temple within. First the space is cleared of years of ego-sediment and habitual overgrowth. Once all the waste is removed from the temple-as-self, then a strong foundation can be laid that takes great care in constructing an aesthetically sensitive raag environment upheld by a resilient taal structure. It is within this newly constructed interior space that the Bani can be placed to resound within the temple of One. The song of One which sings to the *man* (heart-mind-soul) can take on various forms, sizes and depths. It may be a newly inspired or previously received melodically emotive and meaningful expression.

While all shabd compositions contain their own level of perception and spiritual insight, it is through the pedagogic process that one is able to recognize the “intangible” wealth of spiritual-musical information held in the shabd-reefs as expressed by Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian:<sup>160</sup> “For Gurmat Sangeet or kirtan, you have to look at the original dhrupad compositions and then try to understand.” (Recorded interview, Chandigarh, Feb 23, 2012) As expressions of saintly ones embodied over hundreds of years, the shabd-reefs contain unique insights into the process of ego-transformation within the psyche.

### 3.4.2 Shabd-Reet(s): Analyzing Spiritual-Musical Symbiosis

Those familiar with the shabd-reefs, a few remembered as written by the Gurus and others recognized as vintage compositions, contend that these compositions contain a psychological, aesthetic, and meaningful symbiosis of the four fundamental elements *raag*, *taal*,

---

<sup>160</sup> Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian is a *rasika* (deep listener), trained musician and scholar. His family has been patrons of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara since the times of Guru Hargobind who invested their ancestor Roop Chand with the name “Bhayee” or Bhai, and was given priestly duties including performing the first *anand karaj* (marriage ceremony) of Guru Gobind Singh.

*shabd*, and *chitt* to affect an embodied experience of the spiritual intent of the bani whether it be directed at the mind suffering from separation or towards the Beloved in celebration of union. Such soteric-aesthetic symbiosis has caused the *puratan* (ancient) *shabd*-reets to be revered as the “treasure of Sikh devotional music and are among the most finished musical styles. They are also the most important of the melodic group of compositions.” (Paintal 1971, 151)

Professor Saxena expresses the importance of being able to sing a composition in such a way that effectively conveys the symbiosis between the text, meaning, and music.

*The text of the composition can be passed down, no difficulty of it, but the musical form depends on the teacher to analyze the correct form of the composition and be able to explain why some words are sung in the ascending way ‘aroh’, and why others have been sung in the ‘avroh’ [descending] way. Why a particular word comes after a particular rhythm? As far as I can see it, authentic dhrupad compositions have been created in such a way that they transition from the last word of a particular segment of the composition, and the next, the first word of the second segment. The transition should be easily manageable, even vocally. {He tries to remember a composition – hums a musical example}*

*If you say ‘udath’ then the voice should go up and if you say ‘anudath’ the voice should go down, it should descend. And the ‘suarat’, the voice should be able to complete this kind of movement, a flowering on its own access. So it is possible.... Regulation of vocal volume is absolutely essential. In actual life, no emotion [that] is experienced- no emotion remains in the same kind of volume. Every emotion is experienced ~ whether it is grief, or wonder or joy or ecstasy ~ it is a rise and fall. So unless you regulate the volume of your voice properly, no suggestion of emotion will be conveyed... (Recorded interview, February 5, 2012.)*

While expressing the importance of being able to symbiotically convey the musicality and emotion with the text, he further illustrates how a composition’s authenticity can be defined by it’s symbiotic content as found within the ancient reets. It is through such analysis that the compositions can be valued for the riches they contain, thus preserved and transmitted as such.



Figure 11: Professor S.K. Saxena at his home in New Delhi, February 5, 2012. Photo by author.

Saxena continues by explaining how the bani's meaning is conveyed through the music awakening feeling and emotion:

*Most compositions depend on the meaning of the words, the formal meaning, and regulation of the volume of voice. They should chime on each other. Only then the singer will be effective. The singer will say "data karam kije" (God is the Giver, please give me grace.) If you say "data" it should not be said "data" but "da-a-ta." It should signify a yearning, a pining for something, so absolute regulation. Generally people, {chuckles} sing dhrupad in a raag, mechanically, without caring for the parity of vocal modulation with the meaning of the text of the song. That is very essential. Words should care for the meaning of the words, the words should be appropriately regulated and then it will be effective. That would be essential. {hums to self} I unfortunately, I have gotten rid of singing or else I would have given a practical illustration. {Then he does begin to sing} "Data," if I do that it would be outrageous. If I say "daataaa, karam ki..." then it would be the yearning. Up to the year 1980 I could sing fairly well but no... {he sits up in bed and his voice opens up and awakens with beautiful feeling as he sings the words "Daata Karam Kije"} The entire composition has to be sung in*

*certain way that it is a yearning for his grace. I am sorry I cannot do it properly but this is absolutely essential.*

*Most of the dhrupad singers, whatever be their traditional gharana, they sing in a very wooden way. They don't understand the meaning of the text and they do not take any care to see to it that the manner of vocal chimes to the meaning of the text. Sound-sense-harmony is a basic aesthetic principal. (Recorded interview, February 5, 2012.)*

While Saxena states that “sound-sense-harmony is a basic aesthetic principal,” he also notes that many dhrupad singers he has come into contact with lack the ability to sing a composition with such symbiosis and further are unable to analyze its soteric-aesthetic confluence. Nevertheless, sound-sense-harmony may be conveyed by an untrained singer, expressed through their own lived experience, and a technical musician may be able to mimic the symbiotic nature, yet not be able to authentically convey its feeling. Thus it is rare to find a musician who is both musically adroit and can effectively convey the sound-sense-harmony symbiosis. It is the exceptionality of symbiotic expression that can be found when analyzing shabd-reet compositions and their transmission that give clues towards past musical expression and insight.

The shabd-reet composition “*Mori Ahan Jaye*”<sup>161</sup> (My Ego is Gone) is remembered as being composed by Guru Arjan Dev himself, and offers an example of sound-sense merger to express the meaning of the Bani.

Bilaaval, Fifth Mehl:

*Morī ahañ jāe darsan pāvaṭ he.*

My ego is gone; I have obtained the Blessed Vision of the Lord's Darshan.

*Rāchahu nāth hī sahāi santṇā.*

I am absorbed in my Lord and Master, the help and support of the Saints.

*Ab charan gahe. ||1|| rahāo.*

Now, I hold tight to His Feet. ||1||Pause||

---

<sup>161</sup> Bani from SGGS 830 and notation from *Gurbani Sangeet: Pracheen Reet Ratnavali* (503-505) can be found in the Appendix: Shabds.

*Āhe man avar na bhāvai chārnāvai chārnāvai uljhio al makrand kamal jio.*

My mind longs for Him, and does not love any other. I am totally absorbed, in love with His Lotus Feet, like the bumble bee attached to the honey of the lotus flower.

*An ras nahī chāhai ekai har lāhai. ||1||*

I do not desire any other taste; I seek only the One Lord. ||1||

*An te tūtīai rikḥ te chhūtīai.*

I have broken away from the others, and I have been released from the Messenger of Death.

*Man har ras ghūtīai sang sādḥū ultīai.*

O mind, drink in the subtle essence of the Lord; join the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, and turn away from the world.

*An nāhī nāhī re.*

There is no other, none other than the Lord.

*Nānak parīṭ charan charan he. ||2||2||129||*

O Nanak, love the Feet, the Feet of the Lord. ||2||2||129||

When the note structures, their movements and the transmitted mode of expression within the first line of this shabd-reet composition are analyzed, we will see that it literally conveys the movement of the ego fading away from the self. It is a unique partaal composition in raag Bilawal, because it is sung in a *madhyam laya* (medium) *chartaal* (twelve beat) pace throughout, rather than changing taals, as is the common definition of a partaal.<sup>162</sup> Here Bhai Baldeep Singh analyzes the symbiosis between the meaning of the shabd and its musical elements, while also recalling how it was taught to him:<sup>163</sup>

“Ahe man avar ao bhavai, charanavai uljhio” (*My mind longs for Him, and does not love any other. I am totally absorbed in love with His Lotus Feet*) - *what a beautiful line! {He demonstrates the gamak (fast vocal vibration) that his great-*

<sup>162</sup> Partaals are unique to the Sikh tradition, created by Guru Ram Das and continued by Guru Arjan. While the standard definition of a *partaal* is a composition with different verses sung in different taals, Bhai Baldeep Singh gives an example of this partaal “*Mori Ahan Jaye*” which does not change rhythms, and is all sung in the *chartaal* twelve beat rhythm, illustrating how the traditional compositions resist standard definitions. Bhai Baldeep explains: “*Some say partaal means panj taal, there must be five taals, one interpretation is this, others say the taals must change, then others say to make a musical genius, change every line. They say “we make 4 different taals in the stanza, asthayi itself, so I am a great musician.” No -the purpose is not that. There is only one taal used in the masterpiece “Mori ahan Jaye” and it is absolutely complete, equally complex.*” (Recorded class discussion, July 15, 2009.)

<sup>163</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh was taught the tools and logic to analyze compositions through interacting with insightful masters Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar, Ustad Fahimuddin Dagar, and Professor SK Saxena.

*grand-uncle Baba Jwala Singh was noted for when singing the word “Uljhio” (to be absorbed or entangled)<sup>164</sup> “Uljhio” is entangled, like a creeper in a tree, where you can’t see where tree ends and vine starts. The tree dies, but the creeper remains. It is like the feet being attached to Akal, the One. You can’t distinguish between tree and vine. “An ras nahi chahai” I desire no other rasa (taste). {Sings} Then the sanchari comes [illustrating how it breaks away quickly from the messenger of death] “An te tutia rikh te chutia” (I have broken away from the others, and I have been released from the Messenger of Death) See how “Jae” [in the refrain, “mori ahan jae”] is expressed {demonstrates how the music goes up in scale, moving the ego away from the self} my ego go, ego go, ego runs away. How? “darsan pavat hey” (by obtaining the darshan, the vision) D –N- S- RN- S. It is not a musical composition, it just came like that. You see the ego going. (Recorded class discussion, Millis, MA, July 15, 2009)*

Although musical analysis is difficult to convey through such explanations and the skeletal musical notation given in the Appendix, such examples do offer insight into how the symbiosis between the shabd, raag, rhythm, and intent are affectively transmitted. The analysis of this shabd-reet composition illustrates how it is not only the notes of a raag that have the ability to convey the emotion of the words, but that the meaning of the words are more wholly expressed by the ornamentations, stresses, volume, approach, and other such musical features that are difficult to notate in a text. This is demonstrated in the previous example given by Bhai Baldeep Singh where the vocal technique of gamak (fast vocal vibration) is employed when singing the word “uljhio” meaning to be absorbed or entangled, actually giving the sense-impression of being entangled with the feet of the divine (charanavai). Additionally, Bhai Baldeep Singh was taught that his great-grand uncle Baba Jwala Singh used this gamak technique to evoke the meaning of the word “uljhio.” This is indicative of the scholarship contained within the parampara pedagogy that teaches not only the techniques of musical production that were used in the past, but offers insight into the possibilities of future musical expression, and conveys extra-musical information by transmitting performative and historical memory.

---

<sup>164</sup> This example illustrates both how musical memory is passed as well as the purpose of ornamentations such as *gamak*, to musically illustrate the act of being entangled with the Divine Lotus Feet.

It is by learning these shabd-reet compositions and being given tools in their analysis that offer clues towards past musical production that can inform future creations. It is also important to note that this composition, along with others, are transmitted, remembered, and conveyed by the parampara not as being composed works but instead as being revealed expressions. Particularly, the symbiotic interaction between the words and musical elements of this composition illustrate Guru Arjan's experience and resulting musical expression of when the "ego goes" (*mori ahan jaye*).

### 3.4.3 Soteric-Aesthetic Symbiosis and Revelation

Due to the insightful quality and soteric-aesthetic symbiotic content of the shabd-reet, many perceive them as being spontaneous revelations that should be learned, appreciated, and remembered as is expressed by Bhayee Sikander S. Bagrian:

*I personally feel that Guru Nanak, out of the Gurus, never composed poetry. You never find any manuscripts that had corrections, with a first and second version. They are all spontaneous singings. You see it will be very difficult, take a partaal or any chaupada with a rahao, it is very difficult to write a poetry in that pattern. It has to emerge. So they are inseparable. The music is inseparable from the shabd and that is why it becomes Bani. Now you will find in the old compositions, in the reets that they sing, you will find these characteristics. (Recorded interview, Feb 23, 2012)*

The process of composing can be contrasted with the notion of spontaneous revelation. Composing is often done over a long period of time, requiring prior knowledge of musical concepts from which to pull. Jourdain attests: "A vast hierarchy of musical concepts is required equipment for composers, yet is not enough," composers need inspiration to be "blown in," it cannot be willed. (Jourdain 169) For the rare and lucky one, a composition comes all at once, but for most it comes in fragments over time, that can then be woven together. (Jourdain 170)





Figure 12: Bhai Balbir Singh (center) performing with his jatha. Photo by author

Because the process of composing takes skill, effort, and time, Sikh musicians call on Guru's *kirpa* (grace) to give them inspiration, as is expressed by Hazoori Ragi, Bhai Balbir Singh.

NK: *How do you compose a partaal?*

Bhai Balbir Singh: *First you read the shabd, then you have to measure how many beats fit in the wording of the shabd. After you have done this, then we say the second line. How many beats does that fit in? Then we can make a composition. Hamare dimaag kamn karta, Maharaj ki kirpa oti hai. (We use our mind, and ask blessing (kirpa) from Maharaj). To write a partaal, first you have to do ardaas [a prayer, as follows] "this is your work, you have given us the task, so you complete this task." (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, Amritsar, Feb 8, 2012)*

I also asked Professor Kartar Singh about his composing process.<sup>165</sup> He states that he either first composes a raag-tune and then finds the bani to fit or is inspired by the bani and then composes a tune to fit.

<sup>165</sup> At the time of the interview Professor Kartar Singh had composed 1286 compositions, published in 5 books, *Gurmat Sangeet Darpan Part I* (2007) *Part II* (2009) *Part III* (2010), along with *Guru Angad Dev Sangeet Darpan* (2008) and *Gurbani Sangeet Darpan* (2009). These are the textbooks used by his students at the Gurmat Sangeet Academy in Anandpur Sahib.

Professor Kartar Singh: *Raag comes, bani comes. Two methods. While writing compositions then I read and choose shabd – what kind of shabd can suit that composition? I write that shabd. Dono [both] method[s]. Sometime[s] my shabd is appealing me, one line is appealing me. I first take that in my mind, that line, and on that basis I write down the composition. But mostly first I write compositions then I take Shabd second. All these compositions are in my books... Sometimes I suddenly write down shabd, and then make composition there at that time. Difficult, yeah, but I do. I just write – I have done when traveling. Whenever I want to write I do. Sometimes I compose bhajans first then I write Gurbani, Sometimes Gurbani comes and I write. Aisaa [like this].*

NK: *Do you have to have gian, some knowledge to compose?*

Professor Kartar Singh: *{points upwards} Grace of God. Kirpa. I do, I continue.*  
(Recorded interview, parts translated from Punjabi, Anandpur Sahib, April 12, 2011.)

While Professor Kartar Singh emphasized the importance of Guru's grace, he speaks of composing as a process that requires skill, where it is rare and "difficult" for a composition to suddenly appear. Western musician and composer Stravinsky has also expressed how acquiring musical ability requires effort to enable inspired experience and expression:

The uninitiated imagine that one must await inspiration in order to create. That is a mistake. I am far from saying that there is no such thing as inspiration; quite the opposite. It is found as a driving force in every kind of human activity, and is no wise peculiar to artists. But that force is only brought into action by an effort, and that effort is work... The musical sense cannot be acquired or developed without exercise. In music as in everything else, inactivity leads gradually to the paralysis, to the atrophying of faculties. (cited in Jourdain 171)

Gurbani Kirtan is both a musical and soteriological practice. In this way, importance is placed on the pedagogic process that enables the practitioner to acquire the necessary musical ability to sing without trying to sing, which is believed to open up the space to become the song itself, a space of Guru's grace. While it is rare for a composition to be "revealed" in full symbiosis, when it is done, it is believed to be a Divine act as expressed by the Western composer Puccini: "The music of this opera was dictated to me by God. I was merely

instrumental in putting it on paper and communicating it to the public.” (cited in Jourdain 170)

Noteworthy, Sikhs along with Western composers appear to agree upon the “revealed” nature of ecstatic musical expression, still they approach it from different ideological standpoints. For parampara-oriented Sikhs, revelation is understood as an ecstatic expression of experiencing the non-dual nature of reality within the self whereas for the Western Judeo-Christian perspective, it is interpreted as a transcendent God, that is separate from the self, speaking to man.

### 3.4.4 Unraveling the Sikh Notion of “Revelation”

The notion that some shabd-reetes are referred to as “revealed songs” linked to “the Gurus themselves,” is argued by van der Linden to indicate a revelation by a “transcendental authoritative source” which he believes is a product of Orientalism “holding on here to the imperial trope of ‘spiritual’ India.” (van der Linden 2012, 250)

...by taking the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib as ‘revealed songs’, which supposedly follow eternal sacred sounds that presently still can be picked up by musical saints (for Sikhs only?) directly from ‘the gurus themselves,’ Bhai Baldeep Singh clearly concedes to some final and transcendental authoritative source. In doing so, in my view, he adheres to a traditional ‘spiritual’ position (see also: Ibid., 259-260)<sup>166</sup> and so, for me at least, provides no possibility for further discussion, because such an interpretation, without any ground in historical evidence, goes beyond the goals of both the disciplines of history and musicology. (van der Linden 2012, 250)

---

<sup>166</sup> Van der Linden is referring to the following statements by Bhai Baldeep Singh in *Sikh Formations* (2011, 259-261): “Kirtan is not merely the singing of gurbani but it is gurbani itself – in other words gurbani was revealed musically. To understand gurbani kirtan, one must ask some other essential questions beyond music – questions about spirituality, about spiritual music. What is it that relates spirituality with music and music with spirituality? Today both are well established independent vocations. Why is it that these, both music and spirituality, now seem to be mostly monotonous, predictable and unaesthetic? What was it that made music spiritual and spirituality musical? (Bhai Baldeep Singh 2008) Simply, Gurbani Kirtan is not a musicians’ music and mere musicians cannot, perhaps, comprehend it. Hazrat Inayat Khan says: ‘The highest and most ideal form of composition is that which expresses life, character, emotions, and feelings, for this is the inner world which is only seen by the eye of the mind... Music loses its freedom by being subject to the laws of technique, but mystics in their sacred music, regardless of the world’s praise, free both their composition and improvisations from the limitations of technicality.’ (Khan 1994, 55)”

The statement that revelation is necessarily linked to a “transcendental authoritative source” while at the same time claiming that a “spiritual position” does not have a place in modern-western scholarship, betrays van der Linden’s position as a “secular” modern scholar. Such a perspective is based in the *ontotheological* dualistic paradigm that perceives a separation between God-man and religion-secularity, thus erasing their deeply intertwined nature.<sup>167</sup>

Bhogal also acknowledges how secular language based in western scientific logic has “sundered knowledge from value, reason from revelations, and law from justice. Abstracting the finite from the infinite, hitherto alien voices from the “outside” were replaced by an inner *familiar* voice of the subjective ego.” (2011, 866) The most problematic aspect of the secular-scientific framework is that by *othering* experiential knowledge and authority expressed through mystical speech, that speech becomes placed in an ahistorical position, into the realm of the “other,” where it does not have the right to enter academic discussion due to its being linked to a “transcendental” “esoteric” realm of “revealed” experience(s) and its expression(s).

Van der Linden further demonstrates his imbedded-ness within the ontotheological matrix when defining “revelation” through a secular-cum-Judeo-Christian lens, assuming that for Sikhs, revelation stems from a transcendent external original authority. However, within Sikhi “revelation” is understood as the expression of the ineffable spontaneous (*sahaj*) experience of the non-dualistic nature of Reality where the experiential bani speaks within the self (ego).<sup>168</sup> Bhayee Sikander S. Bagrian clearly elucidates the Sikh perspective of bani as a “revelation”:

---

<sup>167</sup> Mandair has extensively illustrated that ontotheology (onto=beyond, theo=religion or God, logos=Word) is predicated on the transcendent notion of a God that dictates the “sacred” Word to man. At the same time it is a transcendent position that enables one to perceive a separation between the secular and the religious, the historian and their object of study, wherein it is actually a move that erases their intimate connection. (Mandair 2009)

<sup>168</sup> SGGS 1092-3. Shalok First Mehl “When one acts in egotism (*haumai*), then You are not there, Lord. Wherever You are, there is no ego. Oh spiritual teachers, understand this: the unspoken speech (*akatha-katha*) is in the mind. Without the Guru, the essence of reality is not found; the Invisible Lord dwells everywhere. One meets the True Guru, and then the Lord is known, when the Word of Shabd comes to dwell in the mind.” (Dr. Sant Singh Khalsa transl.)

*Bani, as we all believe, is a revelation. It is an expression of an experience, an expression of an unsayable, and that unsayable is soaked in raag because raag is also basically an expression of the unsayable, a coloring of mind, all the terms that the classical musicians use for it. From the unsayable you get the articulate. The unsayable is either rhythmic or a sensory pattern. And then it gets transformed into a language. That becomes the Shabd. The spoken shabd.*  
(Recorded interview, Feb 23, 2012)

Here *revelation* is understood as an unsayable experience that becomes articulated. The articulation of the ineffable, *akatha-katha*<sup>169</sup> (unspoken speech) is itself a paradox, founded in a devotional logic expressed and experienced through the bani. Therefore the bani can be understood as a soteric-aesthetic expression that transgresses the normal operations of logic and reason. It is anti-foundational, without the operations of the ego to pose as a stable ground. Instead of defining revelation as the product of a transcendent and external authority, the bani as a “revealed” expression can be understood as grounded in a devotional logic coming from a *post-ego* subjectivity (Bhagal 2011) that views no difference between the self and other, the knower and known, the revealer and the revelation. Thus the paradoxical nature of bani as a revelatory expression of the ineffable is founded in a devotional logic, that is deemed by van der Linden as “esoteric” and thus beyond the purview of any humanistic or “scientific” discipline. With van der Linden and other contemporary scholars working within the modern paradigm that places non-contradictory logic as the foundation for all knowledge, it is true that it becomes almost impossible to have a discussion on the authenticity and authority of a spiritually experiential

---

<sup>169</sup> SGGS 1291. Shalok First Mehla “The True Guru is the All-knowing Primal Being; He shows us our true home within the home of the self. The Panch Shabad, the Five Primal Sounds, resonate and resound within; the insignia of the Shabad is revealed there, vibrating gloriously. Worlds and realms, nether regions, solar systems and galaxies are wondrously revealed. The strings and the harps vibrate and resound; the true throne of the Lord is there. Listen to the music of the home of the heart - Sukhmani, peace of mind. Lovingly tune in to His state of celestial ecstasy. Contemplate the Unspoken Speech, and the desires of the mind are dissolved. The heart-lotus is turned upside-down, and is filled with Ambrosial Nectar. This mind does not go out; it does not get distracted. It does not forget the Chant which is chanted without chanting; it is immersed in the Primal Lord God of the ages. All the sister-companions are blessed with the five virtues. The gurmukhs dwell in the home of the self deep within. Nanak is the slave of that one who seeks the Shabad and finds this home within. ||1||”

practice that itself deconstructs ego-based notions of logic altogether. Because of this, notions of authenticity and authority are more productively assessed in relation to a practical pedagogy that teaches how to become an authoritative *vidwan* who creates their own authentic musical expressions as stated by Bhai Baldeep Singh:<sup>170</sup>

*Let the mystical part or the practice part be for the believers in that path. For us it is education. We learn so much. It brings us such evidence from that time. That is huge. A huge gift that these compositions bring to us. (Recorded class discussion, Millis, MA, July 15, 2009.)*

### 3.5 Authenticity

#### 3.5.1 Ancient Compositions Remembered and Sung by Living Books

In an effort to determine authentic aspects of the orally-transmitted parampara, I asked Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian<sup>171</sup> about the authenticity of the compositions passed down by the parampara. He recognizes how authenticity can be subjective, while also acknowledging the dynamic nature of authenticating music that evolves over time.

*Authenticity is hard to establish.... you can only perceive with your own sense of feeling and meditation. If you listen to a particular composition, you may be able to assess that this is the one that could be an older one. But there is no, what you call, pukka [sure] thing, that you can assess and say this is the one which was at that time.... Over the time it keeps on changing, even between the generations there is a change... Bhai Dharam Singh [Zakhmi], I remember a couple of their shabds that are not there with his grandsons... That is where the personality of the person, as I say - one has to merge into it. The personality of the person has to merge into the kirtan. There are two or three families left who are traditional. (Recorded Interview, Chandigarh, February 23, 2012.)*

While the authenticity of ancient compositions can be difficult to determine since there are only a few families left who have been taught, remember, and preserve what knowledge remains, it becomes important to recognize the memory that they still contain through musical analysis,

---

<sup>170</sup> Still, the pedagogic process may facilitate an experiential process that takes the practitioner into an “esoteric” realm where the soteric-aesthetic bani becomes embodied within the self as a *living book*.

<sup>171</sup> Elder brother of Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian.

while also acknowledging the aspects that have changed over time to gain a clear picture of the current state of Gurbani Kirtan, to sift the authentic aspects from those newly invented.

To further the investigation into the authenticity of the shabd-reet, I asked many musicians to name those parampara memory-bearers who still remain. Sadly, while there is a dearth of extant memory-bearers, the late 11th generation exponents Bhai Avtar Singh and his elder brother Bhai Gurcharan's Singh's family were consistently acknowledged, whose lineage includes Bhai Avtar Singh's son 12th generation Bhai Kultar Singh and their grand-nephew 13th generation Bhai Baldeep Singh.<sup>172</sup>

Other traditional memory-bearers mentioned were the four-generations of Zakhmis<sup>173</sup>, seventh generation exponent Bhai Balbir Singh, the late Namdhari Guru Jagjit Singh and his late brother Maharaj Bir Singh,<sup>174</sup> as well as the rababis Bhai Mohammad Chand and Bhai Lal.<sup>175</sup> I ask the Zakhmis and Bhai Balbir Singh about the extant memory-bearers:

---

<sup>172</sup> The family has tracked their Sikh lineage to their forefather Bhai Sadharan Sembhi (the architect of Baoli Sahib at Goinwal during Guru Amar Das' time), Bhai Sahib Singh (a close associate of Guru Gobind Singh), Bhai Mehtab Singh whose son was Baba Tehal Singh (famous for singing Panj Pdarthi Asa di Vaar from sunset to sunrise). His son, Bhai Deva Singh (d. 1894) had two sons, Baba Jwala Singh (1872-1952) and Bhai Narain Singh (1858-1906). Baba Jwala Singh had two sons, Bhai Gurcharan Singh (b. 1914) and Bhai Avtar Singh (1925-2006) whose son is Bhai Kultar Singh (b. 1964). Bhai Narain Singh's son was kirtaniya Gyani Bhagat Singh (1897-1986) whose grandson is Bhai Baldeep Singh (b. 1969).

<sup>173</sup> The first generation of Zakhmis had three brothers, Bhai Sardara, Daulat, and Umrao Singh who were in a jetha together with Bhai Sardara on taus (nicknamed "morni wala Baba"). Bhai Daulat had four sons and one daughter. The four sons created a jetha including Bhai Dharam, Shamsheer, Gursharn and Lal Singh. Bhai Dharam Singh had five sons, one whom is the late Bhai Amrik Singh who along with his son Bhai Harjot Singh, and Bhai Umrao Singh's grandson Bhai Amritpal Singh made up a jetha until Bhai Amrik Singh recently passed on Nov. 10, 2013. Although it is believed that they stemmed from the rababi tradition, they clearly answered that they do not. Instead they told me that the name "Zakhmi" was given to Bhai Dharam Singh, as a pen name by his teacher and later the Jethadar of the Akal Takht proclaimed that Bhai Amrik Singh should also use this moniker. (Zakhmi, Bhai Amrik, Bhai Harjot, and Bhai Amritpal Singh, recorded interview, Sultanpur Lodhi, Feb 20, 2012.)

<sup>174</sup> The role of the Namdharis in preserving traditional Gurbani Kirtan is discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>175</sup> Unfortunately I have not yet had the opportunity to interview the few extant rababis, though I have benefited from the research done by Bhai Baldeep Singh, Balbir Singh Kanwal (2010), Navtej Purewal



Figure 13: From left to right: Bhai Amritpal Singh Zakmi, Bawanpreet Singh Zakhmi, Bhai Harjot Singh Zakhmi, Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi, author. At the Anad Conservatory Qila Sultanpur Lodi. Photo by author.

NK: *Who is still doing old style kirtan?*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Bhai Balbir Singh Ji, Bhai Baldeep Singh Ji, Kultar Bhai Ji, we are trying some.*

NK: *Are there any other families that remember these compositions from the Guru's times?*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Bhai Baldeep Singh, he knows.* (Recorded interview, Feb 20, 2012.)

Hazoori Ragi Bhai Balbir Singh also answers similarly:

NK: *Are there many families that remember compositions from Guru's times?*

Bhai Balbir Singh: *Ha(n) [yes]— Baldeep de chacha, pardada (Bhai Baldeep Singh's uncle and granduncles<sup>176</sup>), in Delhi, Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai*

---

(2011), and Sarbpreet Singh (founder of Gurmat Sangeet Project in Boston, MA, websites: [gurmatangeetproject.com](http://gurmatangeetproject.com) and [gurmatangeet.blogspot.com](http://gurmatangeet.blogspot.com))

<sup>176</sup> Bhai Balbir Singh is referring to Bhai Baldeep Singh's uncle Bhai Kultar Singh and Granduncles Bhai Gurcharan Singh and the late Bhai Avtar Singh. While Bhai Balbir Singh does say "pardada" meaning



*Gurcharan Singh. They are ancient families. Zakhmis have [the vidya] but father [Bhai Dharam Singh Zakhmi] died, uncle died, and the kids do some, so the complete and pure form is being broken (puran tor te karna hai). (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, Amritsar, Feb 8, 2012)*

Those elder musicians and scholars whom I interviewed have been exposed to generations of Sikh musical heritages since the mid 20th century, thus giving them the unique ability to recognize both how musical memory is maintained and how change occurs between generations.

While musical variations are inevitable in the process of oral transmission, there are techniques that enhance memory and have allowed ancient texts like the Vedas as well as the Illiad and Odyssey to be memorized and passed down over centuries. (Graham 72) Within the parampara, students are taught how to develop their *semantic memory* through understanding musical concepts that can be woven together into patterns. (Jourdain 169) Once these building blocks are created, *episodic memory* is accessed which has “the ability to recollect an entire composition note-for-note” an ability that is viewed as “possibly the most remarkable memory feat in human experience.” (Jourdain 169) While researchers don’t understand how large chunks of information can be remembered, they believe that it may involve tape-recorder memory that makes moment-to-moment associations or perhaps is the product of long sequences of combinations, that categorize large portions into a musical hierarchy. (Jourdain 169) By understanding the role of memory in storing verbatim information over time, we see that the authenticity of a composition can be linked to an authentic systematic scholarship that teaches the logic and insight of how to learn, sing, and analyze such compositions. In this way, it is through undergoing the parampara methodology that the musician is given the tools to appreciate and appropriately preserve and evolve their genre.

---

grandfather, it should be noted that Bhai Baldeep Singh’s great-grandfather was Baba Narain Singh, a great kirtaniya-ragi and elder brother to Baba Jwala Singh, Bhai Gurcharan and Bhai Avtar Singhs’ father, all memory-bearers of the puratan shabd-reet.

### 3.5.2 Analyzing Authentic Compositions through their Soteric-Aesthetic Symbiosis

The multi-faceted meanings given to notions of authenticity and authority within the parampara begin to deconstruct the mimetic and ontotheological logic that places authority in a transcendent position. Instead of defining authenticity on a linear scale with the origin as innately “pure” and thus authentic, can authenticity instead be found in the confluence between spiritual and musical aspects? Can it be defined in the moment of experience? If so, authenticity can be defined by the various aspects of the parampara: those compositions that maintain a soteric-aesthetic symbiosis, as sung by authoritative vidwans, who are taught through an authentic pedagogic process how to render and analyze those compositions for their symbiotic content.

The parampara teaches the importance of analyzing compositions for their soteric-aesthetic symbiosis as a tool to determine the compositions’ authenticity as a composition that “reveals” an authentic experience. In addition to compositional analysis, musical learning is often interjected with relevant musical, philosophical and historical examples, which are often repeated over multiple classes or years, both as a memorization tool as well as to convey the weight, depth, and value of the knowledge being imparted. Within the pedagogy, storytelling plays an important role to contextualize the knowledge within a lived historical context, giving validity to the memory by acknowledging who it has been passed through, how it has been remembered, and the importance of such memory. Following are two examples of compositional analysis done by Bhai Baldeep Singh, who also interjects historical and ideological knowledge of the parampara: 1) “Ghar Mai Thakur” is a composition remembered as being composed by Guru Arjan himself, and 2) “Dheero Dekh Tumare Ranga” is an ancient shabd-reet.

**“Ghar Mai Thakur” by Guru Arjan**

*Sūhī mēhlā 5.*

Soohee, Fifth Mehl:

*Ghar mēh thākur naḍar na āvai.*

Within the home of his own self, he does not even come to see his Lord and Master.

*Gal mēh pāhaṇ lai latkāvai. ||1||*

And yet, around his neck, he hangs a stone god. ||1||

*Bharṁe bhūlā sākaṭ firṭā.*

The faithless cynic wanders around, deluded by doubt.

*Nir birolai khap khap martā. ||1|| rahāo.*

He churns water, and after wasting his life away, he dies. ||1|| Pause ||

*Jis pāhaṇ kao thākur kaṭṭā.*

That stone, which he calls his god,

*Oh pāhaṇ lai us kao dubṭā. ||2||*

That stone pulls him down and drowns him. ||2||

*Gunahgār lūṇ harāmī.*

O sinner, you are untrue to your own self;

*Pāhaṇ nāv na pārgiramī. ||3||*

A boat of stone will not carry you across. ||3||

*Gur mil Nānak thākur jāṭā.*

Meeting the Guru, O Nanak, I know my Lord and Master.

*Jal thal mahīal pūran biḍhāṭā. ||4||3||9||*

The Perfect Architect of Destiny is pervading and permeating the water, the land and the sky. ||4||3||9||

The masterpiece “Ghar Mai Thakur”<sup>177</sup> (Within the Self-Home is the Master) is believed to be a “revelation” by Guru Arjan himself as expressed through its soteric-aesthetic symbiosis.

*See the visual? With each note being sung, the whole visual of an inner dwelling temple is enacted. The notes of the raag are used to illustrate and create the contentment and sahaj of making one’s own home, “mai ghar” the place where the “thakur” the master, dwells. It is the sound, the naad, which suddenly creates a reality in front of you, it is not just an illusion. The problem is that people do not see the visual that the song gives. They are not able to translate it into their own life. Ghar- home, mai- in me, thakur- is the master. It is an invitation to enlightenment. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Millis, MA, July 15, 2009.)*

In addition to the symbiotic content demonstrating that within the self is the Master, the composition brings with it valuable musico-historic information, with an emphasis on appreciating how much care has been taken to transmit memory and knowledge over centuries.

*I am sharing these [masterpieces] because as I am giving you a jewel I am also giving you the appreciation, don’t waste them, don’t think these are pebbles. Not because Guru Arjan composed them. But as my grandmother said, “You must remember the journey we have taken to you. You must not forget the time when your great ancestor Baba Tehel Singh had a kanda with a sword in one hand a dhal [shield] in another and a saranda slung on his back, living in the jungles. This treasure is of the Guru, save it, make sure you hold it properly, don’t forget how it has been kept and saved until you would sing.” This is my grandmother Bibi Sant Kaur. And since then I salute her too. Wow, what a perspective. The mughals had given a price on the head, at that time everything they lost, they lost their lands, but the vidiya was never lost. They made sure the vidya, the knowledge, was passed on. Don’t forget the journey. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, July 15, 2009.)*

Through socio-political turmoil the knowledge was safeguarded as the “intangible” heritage and treasure of the GurSikhs. While the process of safeguarding knowledge is an important one, Bhai Baldeep Singh stresses that even with their esteemed authorship and history:

---

<sup>177</sup> Bani from Siri Guru Granth Sahib 739 and translation from Dr. Sant Singh Khalsa. Full notation found in the Appendix

*It is not because of even this that I value these. It is because of the content that is in them as a musical masterpiece. The symbiosis between the raag, taal, shabd, and avdhana – intent – surt - chitt. It is a beautiful symbiosis. That is why I call them masterpieces. Not because it has been remembered for so long or because it is composed by Guru Arjan. (Recorded class discussion, July 15, 2009.)*

In this way Bhai Baldeep Singh places the shabd-reet's true value in the soteric-aesthetic symbiosis found within the compositions themselves, which offer insight into how devotional experience was musically expressed.

**“Dheero Dekkh Tumaare Rangaa” by Guru Arjan**

*Bilāval mēhlā 5.*

Bilaaval, Fifth Mehl:

*Dhīrao dekh tumhārai rangā.*

I am reassured, gazing upon Your wondrous play.

*Fuhī suāmī antarjāmī tūhī vasēh sādḥ kai sangā. ||1|| rahāo.*

You are my Lord and Master, the Inner-knower, the Searcher of hearts; You dwell with the Holy Saints. ||1||Pause||

*Khīn mēh thāp nivāje thākur nīch kīt te karahi rājangā. ||1||*

In an instant, our Lord and Master establishes and exalts. From a lowly worm, He creates a king. ||1||

*Kabhū na bisrai hīe more te Nānak dās ihī dān mangā. ||2||15||101||*

May I never forget You from my heart; slave Nanak prays for this blessing.

||2||15||101||<sup>178</sup>

An example of how the raag, taal, and shabd create a symbiosis for a soteric-aesthetic intentionality can be found in another composition by Guru Arjan “*Dheero Dekh Tumaare Rangaa*”<sup>179</sup> (I Am Reassured Gazing Upon Your Wondrous Play) sung in the major scale of raag Bilaval to the twelve-beat Chartaal rhythm.

<sup>178</sup> Asthai (refrain) of “Dheero Dekkh Tumaare Rangaa” in transliteration and translation. Full notation can be found in the Appendix

<sup>179</sup> Bani from Siri Guru Granth Sahib 824. Musical notation by author.



Figure 14: Bhai Gurcharan Singh (far left), Bhai Avtar Singh (middle on taus), Bhai Rattan Singh (right on tabla). Photo courtesy of Bhai Baldeep Singh.

*Why was the vaadi [prominent note] being said on “khin mai tap”? Look! {sings} The meaning is actually carried in the word “tapana” on the Vadi swar (main thematic note). When you analyze scientifically and logically the composition, you see how the original of the Guru remembered in the Nankana Sahib tradition that was passed on to me through Bhai Samund Singh to Bhai Rattan Singh to Bhai Avtar Singh to me.<sup>180</sup> In this composition, you see the mutualism of the raag, taal, shabd, and due intentness - all the four elements. “Tapana” - ki hunda hai? [“What happens?”] To anoint someone, and vaadi is the Dhaivat [“Da” or sixth]. So it is very ‘viirg’ [austere] {Sings “Tumaare” ending on “Sa”}. “Sa” is the mandal [realm] of Akal of Nirankar [Timeless Formless One]. {Sings “ni*

<sup>180</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh explains “Bhai Rattan Singh from our village, if you see the picture of Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan, from the live broadcast (shown in Figure 14, he is the one playing the tabla-jori. He is a classmate of Bhai Avtar Singh. They both studied together when they were little... and Bapu ji would say – “come on, both of you stand up and do the taali without the instruments” {Sings “Anand rang binod hamaaree, anand rang binod hamaaree.”} Guru’s original masterpiece, with two youngsters singing from the village, one is Bhai Avtar one is Bhai Rattan Singh, young kids, how education used to be!” (Recorded class discussion, Knoxville, TN, July 22, 2006.)

*vaa-je” with the word “ni” on the seventh note “Ni” note and the word “vaa-je” on the “Sa”, the home dwelling note.} “Ni” is the mandal of Hell, death da mandal. {Illustrating how in an instant “khin me”, the “thakur” sung on “Sa” can glorify “nivaje” and raise the mortal to the Akal}*

*{Sings “Nich kit te kare rajanga”} In spite of all my failings “dheero dekh tumare rangā” {I am content seeing all your colors}. How beautiful! (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, Knoxville, TN, July 22, 2006.)*

After illustrating the confluence between music and meaning within this shabd-reet, Bhai Baldeep comments on how the phrase “Mai Vaari” (I am a sacrifice) is sung within this composition but not found in the bani itself. Within the revival of traditional modes, there are reformists who argue that no extraneous words should be added to the bani and such words should be removed from the shabd-reet, therefore retroactively imposing normative prescriptions onto the extant practices of traditional Sikh musicians,<sup>181</sup> causing Bhai Baldeep to question: “And now you tell me today that now it is forbidden to add any words!?” (Recorded class discussion, July 22, 2006.)

Problematically modern orthopraxic restrictions appear to place sole authority in the written text and disregard the musical practices that have come down through the shabd-reet

---

<sup>181</sup> Specific examples of this issue will be discussed in Chapter 5 with multiple traditional lineages and musicians explaining that the compositions with these added words represent some of the oldest remembered compositions. Such negation of lived practice may be related to the regulation in the modern *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (codified in the 1950s). Chapter 5 Article VI that states: “d) It is improper, while singing hymns to rhythmic folk tunes or to traditional musical measures, or in team singing, to induct into them improvised and extraneous refrains. Only a line from the hymn should be made a refrain.” ([http://sgpc.net/rahit\\_maryada/section\\_three\\_chap\\_five.html](http://sgpc.net/rahit_maryada/section_three_chap_five.html)) Noteworthy however, the modern Sikh *Rahit Maryada* only rejects the use of whole extraneous lines being sung as the chorus, and not just one or two expressive words such as “Ji! Wah! Pyare!”. Nevertheless, those reformists who only look to the authority of the text, the words found within the *Guru Granth Sahib*, may reject past-lived practices and their experiential expressions.

compositions.<sup>182</sup> The memory transmitted by the Gurbani Kirtan parampara is not limited by modern standardized definitions that promote musical, cultural, or political boundaries. Instead it opens up present standard definitions to past historical practice of Gurbani Kirtan through stories, exegesis, and musical analysis and resists modern identification along gender-caste-creed-national-political boundaries.<sup>183</sup>

*We forget. We are so quick to say this is wrong, this is wrong. See the placement – where it is placed “khin mai thapa...” [in an instant I am fixated] “Khabhu na visare...” [never forget] - here you are frightened, you are fearful [of forgetting], and this same pattern, same pattern as antara and abhog. Most of the times this composition is do tukha [two line] or do pade [two verse], but it has two stanzas, one is antara [verse] the other is abhog [ending]. Here antara and abhog, though similar notation, but the bhav [feeling] is different, first one is celebrative. {sings “khine me thap”} Wonderment rang [lit. color, emotion]. Nanak, vismai pavai gun gaie da, in vismai [wonderment] he sings. You want to see Nanak Guru? You want to see vismai? That is where he stands and sings. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, July 22, 2006.)*

---

<sup>182</sup> Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss how normative prescriptions have been imposed by the reformist agenda by placing authority largely in the written text.

<sup>183</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh, while teaching a compositions of Guru Arjan’s makes the overall point that Gurbani Kirtan practice has historically been genderless, creedless, and casteless where women and Muslim rababis would sing compositions not limited by standardized definitions. “You know Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, [1718 – 1783] the first [Sikh] raja, the first king. What was his specialty as a child? He used to do kirtan and play saranda. And he came into the notice of Mata Sunderi, wife of Guru Gobind Singh, who at her time, after he had moved on, has given hukamnamas to the GurKhalsa. We forget this history. After 10 gurus, it is the wife of the Tenth Guru who is giving writs to the Gur-Khalsa. And she chooses this boy because of his very fine kirtan, and he used to play the saranda, and he is the one that was king of Kapurthala. He became Maharaj Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, he did not have a child, he adopted the current line of maharajas... look at someone who taught Jassa Singh Ahluwalia the kirtan, his father had died, he was a student of his own mother. We forget these things because we don’t know how to value them. Most of the men had died fighting, who was there? The mothers. Look at the stories, the oral narratives... We forget these things. And what does it mean? It means that they all studied together in Gur-Sangat. That is the very intimate aspect I take from it. That it was not only men learning together, the mother is not only teaching, but is giving them knowledge, teaching Gurus’ doctrine. It means they have studied shoulder to shoulder together. Extraordinary, Mata Sunderi, what a grand lady, what can we say? How fascinating their stories.” (Recorded class discussion, July 22, 2006.)



The above example given by Bhai Baldeep Singh raises an important point - even though the notes of the antara and the abhog are basically the same, they nevertheless convey two different *bhava*-s (moods) or *rasas* (emotions) in the same composition, in the same raag. This example questions the “one-raag, one-mood” theory<sup>184</sup> attached to raags that states a raag “must evoke a particular emotion or create a certain mood” and that the “association of a particular raag with a specific emotional state ...is as relevant as its melodic structure.” (Bor 1999, 1) Such an illustration points beyond the sole ability of the notes to convey a mood, and toward the importance of the singer’s intent in conveying the various emotive meanings contained within a single shabd even though they may be sung in the same raag, with the same notes.<sup>185</sup>

The antara “*khin mai thapa...*” (in an instant I am fixated) expresses the wonderment of being attached to the One while the abhog “*khabhu na visare...*” reflects the fearful anxiety of loosing the attachment to the One and implores the mind to never forget. It takes a skilled musician to be able to express the different *bhava*-s with the same notes without changing the raag, and to be able to perceive the very need within the bani to express the lines differently.

*And the second one [abhog ending], “Khaba huu na visare” {never forget} gur pap lea [guru expresses the sin of forgetting]. You have been anointed, you have been placed on a pedestal, but you know how you have gotten it, by way of remembrance, by way of gurmukh, by getting entangled. As Guru says “ahe manaahee avar na bhavai, charanavai, charanavai, bhuljio...” by being entangled, it is because of that that you have become raja yoga and everything. So you say, I have gotten all this, so the key is your remembrance. You are not entangled with the success but you are still aware and remembering that it is because of the “hi-e,” {mind} because of the “khabu na visare, hi-e, hi-e” [oh mind, never forget]{recites over and over, imploring the mind to not forget} “hi-e...Nanak Das ehe dan manga” [oh mind...Slave Nanak prays for this gift] it comes as a sigh, a sigh of relief, a sigh of gratitude. How can you say this [“mai vaari” addition] is wrong? We don’t even - we don’t even know what it is to study. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep. Recorded class discussion, July 22, 2006.)*

---

<sup>184</sup> See Sikh Formations (2012, Vol. 8) “Emotions in Sikh Musicology” H.S Lallie, Sandeep Kaur, Keerat Singh who analyze the popular “one raag, one rasa” theory in the context of Sikh shabds to illustrate that multiple emotions are expressed in each shabd, in the same raag.

<sup>185</sup> Will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

It is such in depth analysis that allows for an understanding and appreciation of the symbiotic soteric-aesthetic elements contained within the shabd-reet compositions. In this way the shabd-reeets offer examples and clues towards the past operative practices that cannot be solely gleamed from the information contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. These compositions that have been remembered as having been sung over the past centuries illustrate that past operative practices resist the homogenous codifications being implemented today, which standardize the raag forms, remove added expressions, and limit Gurbani to only being sung in the raag as indicated in the Guru Granth Sahib. Whether their origin lies with the Gurus, their courts, or GurSikhs, shabd-reeets offer a window into the insight of masterful vidwans, as acknowledged by Bhayee Sikander S. Bagrian:

*There is another old composition in Dev Gandhari, “Kahaho milai kit gali, mero sundar.” If you listen to the second part of the asthayi, you find three or four varieties of virha (longing of love) in it. When you start hearing with that point of view, then you start finding meaning in it. These are the kinds of compositions, I do not think you can teach through classes – “this is the raag, this is the taal”- no. One has to go back to the reets and one has to preserve them and that should be the basis of teaching for kirtan. And there are umpteen illustrations of it. (Recorded interview, Feb 23, 2012.)*

## **Conclusion: Towards Future Creations**

The parampara pedagogy teaches a student how to sing and analyze the shabd-reeets for their musical, historical, and spiritual insight. This enables the compositions to not only be remembered over time but also teaches a student the tools to use that logic towards future creations, illustrated by Saxena:

*New compositions are possible even now. But in order to bring them up to, qualitatively, to bring them up to the standard of the older compositions, one has to do their own creative work very reverently and very humbly, depending on God’s grace. I tell you in my own way, though my knowledge of the grammar of music is quite limited, my attention is intense, analytic, and I have been able to create some compositions that are probably not inferior to them, I would not say superior, but not inferior to traditional compositions. I created a Damar- and I sang it to my Ustad Rahimuddin Khan Dagur who opened my eyes to the glory of*

*music. I can still recall the situation. He was sitting outside the kitchen of my house and I had just finished lecturing, my daily job lecturing to the students, and I said to him “Khan Sahib, I have been able to do some random creative work, I have been able to create a composition, and please check if it is all nonsense” and I sang the bandish, damar, and he held his forehead and he said, “honestly bhaiya, we have no composition that can match your composition.” So grateful! And ‘Khailate hori shyam’ in damar {he sings, opens with raag- aaah} “now I think I can do it better” {sits up and sings} ‘chapalat madyamati khailate hori shyam’ now one is to follow the principle of sound and sense, ‘chapalat’ means lively, so the vocal application should follow the same. {Continues to sing the example and laughs} Oh, after a number of years, thanks to you, I have been able to recall this composition. And the text of dhrupad compositions are sublime. (Recorded interview, Feb 5, 2012.)*

The traditional educative process is valued not for recovering nostalgic remnants of the past, but for offering experiential knowledge (gnosis) through a rigorous pedagogic methodology. Part of the pedagogy teaches the student how to learn and remember the “revealed” shabd-reefs that have been transmitted orally over the centuries, while also giving insight into their soteric-aesthetic symbiosis. In this way, the parampara methodologies as taught by knowledgeable vidwans, offer the students the devotional logic of the parampara who themselves become living books with their own revealed creations. Through the parampara’s extant and diverse operative practices, we see that they resist being subsumed by the normative methodologies and ideologies that have come to predominate Gurmat Sangeet.

The following chapters will investigate the contemporary revival-cum-reform of Gurbani Kirtan, being labeled as Gurmat Sangeet. Though attempting to revive traditional musicalities, we will see that reformist modes of logic have been appropriated for the standardization and institutionalization of a Sikh musical identity. While some revivalists embrace diversity and change through time, discerning those concepts and practices that do not fit with the transformational Sikh concepts, others attempt to homogenize a self-same identity through normative concepts. These fundamental differences have sparked much debate within the Gurbani Kirtan renaissance.

## Chapter 4

### Gurmat Sangeet:

### Contemporary Reform of Sikh Musical Memory & Identity

#### Introduction

Due to India's changing socio-political, and technological scene over the last 200 years, the Sikh "intangible" inheritance that was the Gurbani Kirtan parampara has become near obsolete and obscured by modern forms as expressed by the famous ragi Bhai Samund Singh, who in 1971 told Bhai Gurcharan and Bhai Avtar Singh with a heavy heart, that "knowledge of kirtan has come to an end." (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 58) Because of this, the 1990s witnessed those few remaining musicians who had safeguarded the "intangible" heritage in their memories and practice, actively preserving and reviving the small percentage of knowledge that remained. In the last thirty years a renaissance of the Gurbani Kirtan heritage has taken place throughout India and the Sikh Diaspora in an attempt to instill traditional oral pedagogy, instrumentation, compositions, and raag forms within Gurbani Kirtan practice for generations to come.

However, with the process of revival and preservation came a desire to create a pure Sikh musical identity. As was seen during 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century Indian national reform, Sikh musical identity also became reformed from a highly specialized and diverse form into a normative format packaged for professional ragis and public consumption. While positively allowing for wider dissemination and easier access, this process has at the same time removed diversity and past operative practices from the genre. Additionally, it has imposed standardized modes onto the memory-bearers and other Gurbani Kirtan practitioners by harkening to the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib and "past" musical practices claimed as being done "in the Guru's way" even when based on modern creations.

#### 4.1 Institutionalization and Politicization of Gurbani Kirtan

India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by British colonialism, a move toward Indian nationalism, and an overall modern democratization of the public and private spheres. Musical patronage shifted from the royal courts to the public consumer, broadening musical knowledge to include lower castes, non-hereditary, and female musicians. Print technology and public education gave the subaltern communities public access to musical knowledge through notation and musical institutions. As a response to British colonialism and Orientalist scholarship, the native elites and princely courts attempted to standardize and institutionalize musical education. (Subramanian 108, 111)

Adopting classical music as the uncontaminated emblem of nationalist culture, Indian publicists from the latter decades of the nineteenth century found it imperative to integrate it within a modern space of institutional education, thereby securing for the art form and its new consumers and custodians, an acceptable and respectable space for its promotion. (Subramanian 107)

As part of the nationalist effort, traditional institutions of knowledge and learning (*gurukalas*, *vidyalas*, and *taksals*) continued to be linked with notions of authenticity and classicism due to their ability to orally transmit their lineage's musical system through a pedagogy that stressed the experiential nature of music making. Though carrying these notions of classicism and authenticity, the investment of time required of the teacher-student relationship was viewed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as incompatible with new avenues of musical transmission and technological reproduction. (Subramanian 124) Lakshmi Subramanian notes the inherent contradictions in the institutionalization of musical education which can be seen as antithetical to the performance oriented approach that had historically defined Indian music where the student-teacher relationship was central to creating musical performers who imbibed their genre's artistic style rather than accumulating musical knowledge to pass university examinations. (Subramanian 132) In this way, she states that perhaps the goal of the modern educational

institutions has not been to produce eminent performers of Indian classical music, but rather to create an informed listening audience and proficient musical teachers. (Subramanian 137)

#### 4.1.1 Sikh Institutions: From Knowledgeable Vidwans to Political Authority of SGPC

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, native elite Singh Sabha reformists re-formed Sikh ideology, identity, and devotional practice to establish *Sikhism* as an independent religion, and Sikhs as modern citizens of an independent Indian nation. In an effort to create a “pure” Sikh (musical) identity, they inevitably removed those elements that were perceived as transgressing Sikh-Khalsa normativity from Sikh socio-religious institutions. The Gurdwara Act of 1925 removed the non-Khalsa Mahants and *Udasis* (followers of Baba Siri Chand, son of Guru Nanak) who had managed the Harimandir Sahib and other historic Gurdwaras during the Sikh-Mughal discord, and had served as dedicated patrons of Gurbani Kirtan. In their place the Khalsa-run Gurdwara management committee, the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC).

Today all the historic Gurdwaras in Punjab are managed by the SGPC while those in Delhi are managed by the *Delhi Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (DGPC). These institutional bodies also run some of the contemporary Gurmat Sangeet *vidyala* schools and employ their graduates as ragis within the historic Gurdwaras, at the Harimandir Sahib, or help them gain employment at Gurdwaras in the diaspora. Late Principal Dyal Singh (1934- Feb 2012) of the Gurmat Vidyala at Rakab Ganj Gurdwara, Delhi told me that the *Nirmalas* and *Udasis* were knowledgeable patrons of sangeet and Gurbani, until the creation of the SGPC in 1925, when as elected officials they no longer maintained nor invested in traditional knowlege.

*The puratan sangeet vidyalas (ancient music training centers) were run by the Nirmala Udasi Gianis (knowledgeable ones). In 1925 the SGPC was created and began to manage the gurdwaras, including centers such as Harimandir Sahib and Tarn Taran, which they took over from Mahants. The election system came in the Dharma. These people had no idea about Gurbani gian (knowledge of Gurbani) or about sangeet gian (knowledge of music), but they were all about money and power. They didn't pay much attention (dhyan) to the Gurbani or sangeet di gur*

*shaile (music in the Guru's style). The older ustads (masters) passed away and there weren't any new educated people to take over... The Gurdwaras are getting money from the donations, they are not using towards teaching [Gurbani Kirtan] or doing research. The Puratan Maryada (tradition bearers) used to love sangeet, do research, and practice on their own. This is all over now. The people who are still around the Gurdwaras haven't done the whole study the way they used to do it and they don't know much about sangeet or raag gian. (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, April 2, 2011.)*

The first generation members of the SGPC maintained a high level of spiritual-aesthetic integrity with regards to Gurbani Kirtan patronage but as elected officials, they soon thereafter were dominated by political agendas. Without the patronage of traditional forms, the memory of heritage Gurbani Kirtan diminished within the Sikh panth. Bhai Gurcharan Singh attributes this current state to the fact that “religion started suffering at the hands of politics.” (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 59) Modern reforms in the name of democracy often resulted in decisions being made by elected committee members with little to no education in the traditions.

The Sikh musicians and scholars I interviewed (some employees of the SGPC and DGCP as head teachers at the vidyala schools and ragis at Darbar Sahib) noted the committees' overall lack of musical knowledge and patronage as the primary reason for the cultural amnesia of traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan.<sup>186</sup> Principal Dyal Singh addresses the impact the 20<sup>th</sup> century politicization of the Gurdwara Management Committees has had on Gurbani Kirtan, with little patronage given to maintain high quality professional ragis:

*The Maryada is fading away and the management (prabandakh) are not even paying attention (dhyān). People who have power (shakti) are just letting it slide. Back in the days, the people who were the caretakers and the management would test the kirtanias first and then let them go on stage. There was a guideline – a syllabus – it is all messed up right now. People who just know basic, they don't take time to learn, they shouldn't let them sit and do kirtan and the management should stop them. They don't have to work that hard because they can still get in*

---

<sup>186</sup> Patronage in this sense does not only consist of monetary support but is also witnessed through honoring its musicians, schools, and memory-bearers while also promoting and upholding standards of musical and pedagogic excellence within the communal culture.

*without that hard work of practice... The Prabhandak committees, the two committees [Shriomani and Delhi] they have crore rupaieea, so much money coming in through donations. The people who have that power, they don't have that knowledge or experience of Gurbani. So how could you value something if you do not know yourself? They are just trying to fill in [ragis at Gurdwaras] it is going just like that. They should do it according to the Maryada (tradition). Because of this, great ragis are not there anymore. (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, April 2, 2011.)*



Figure 15: Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi at his home in Amritsar, April 24, 2011. Photo by author.

The sentiment that monetary concerns and politics have replaced an emphasis on training highly skilled musicians was also affirmed by the Head Ragi (at the time of the interview) at Harimandir Sahib, Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi who expressed that there are set requirements for musicians to be given employment as *Hazoori Ragis* (resident musicians at the Golden Temple), however:



*The committees are political. There is no lack of money. Here there is enough money to provide [for] the perfect reciters (ragis). We should select from the whole world, because this place is a religious top place. For Muslims [it] is Mecca, for us [it] is Sach Khand Sri Harimandir Sahib. [The] top reciters in world, why not get them here? We should pay them thousands of lakhs of rupees but there is no effort for this. This is [the] reason why it has not [just] become low but extreme low. (Recorded interview, Amritsar, April 24, 2011.)*

#### **4.1.2 Political Patronage: Employing Ragis at Harimandir Sahib**

At the Harimandir Sahib (locally referred to as *Darbar Sahib*) there is continuous singing of Gurbani Kirtan from around two in the morning until ten at night, divided into eight *chaunkis* (phases of the day) where professional ragis are slotted to sing during those times in particular raags which correlate to the three-hour period of each chaunki. With Gurbani Kirtan being sung throughout the day, there are many ragis employed as professional Hazoori Ragis at the Harimandir Sahib, with guest ragis also invited, further explicated by Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi:

*At Darbar Sahib there are approximately thirty-five employed teams reciting kirtan in Darbar Sahib - but not traditional. There are a few ragis who recite traditional [Gurbani Kirtan in raags] ....and then there are guest ragis that come... Ten ragi [jathas fill the schedule] from the beginning of the day, early in the morning -from two in the morning- the kirtan is recited up to ten at night. During this time, ragis have one to two hours to perform duties. Some perform duties and some are standbys and some parties (jathas) go out for celebrations, Gurpurbs in other cities, so then standbys perform. Then they play at the different chaunkis for the day. The duty changes, daily they change it, the ragis and the duties change. One duty is not fixed to one ragi. (Recorded interview, Amritsar, April 24, 2011.)*

Date	1	2	3	4	Date	5	6	7	8
	03-00 to 03-50 Morning 01-10 to 02-20 Noon	Assa Di Waar 03-50 - to 07-00 Morning Broadcasting	07-00- to 08-00 Morning 02-20 to 03-20 Noon	08-00- to 09-00 Morning 03-20 to 04-20		09-00 to 10-00 Morning 04-20 to 05-40 Broadcasting	10-00- to 11-00 Morning 06-00 to 07-15 Aarti	11-00- to 12-00 Morning 07-15 to 8-30	12-00- to 01-10 Noon 8-30 to till Completion
1-1-14	Bhai Bhupinder Singh	Bhai Sukhjinder Singh	Bhai Randhir Singh	Bhai Narinder Singh	1-1-14	Bhai Kamail Singh	Bhai Harjitpal Singh	Bhai Harminder Singh	Bhai Kamaljit Singh
2-1-14	Bhai Harjitpal Singh	Bhai Manjit Singh	Bhai Jagtar Singh	Bhai Sulakhan Singh	2-1-14	Bhai Ravinder Singh	Bhai Shokeen Singh	Bhai Jabartoor Singh	Bhai Jagdeep Singh
3-1-14	Bhai Sukhjinder Singh	Bhai Onkar Singh	Bhai Lakhwinder Singh	Bhai Kamail Singh	3-1-14	Bhai Davinder Singh	Bhai Sarabjit Singh	Bhai Avtar Singh	Bhai Harminder Singh
4-1-14	Bhai Sarabjit Singh	Bhai Shokeen Singh	Bhai Gurkirat Singh	Bhai Jabartoor Singh	4-1-14	Bhai Jaspinder Singh	Bhai Makhan Singh	Bhai Narinder Singh	Bhai Karaj Singh
5-1-14	Bhai Tarbalbir Singh	Bhai Gurdev Singh	Bhai Kamaljit Singh	Bhai Sukhwinder Singh	5-1-14	Bhai Sarabjit Singh	Bhai Harminder Singh	Bhai Jujhar Singh A	Bhai Sukhpreet Singh
6-1-14	Bhai Shokeen Singh	Bhai Gurkirat Singh	Bhai Tarbalbir Singh	Bhai Harminder Singh	6-1-14	Bhai Balwinder Singh L	Bhai Gurdev Singh	Bhai Sukhbir Singh	Bhai Jabartoor Singh
7-1-14	Bhai Gurvinder Singh	Bhai Sarabjit Singh	Bhai Shokeen Singh	Bhai Karaj Singh	7-1-14	Bhai Gurdev Singh	Bhai Jujhar Singh	Bhai Randhir Singh	Bhai Makhan Singh
8-1-14	Bhai Karaj Singh	Bhai Randhir Singh	Bhai Sukhjinder Singh	Bhai Jujhar Singh	8-1-14	Bhai Inderjit Singh	Bhai Gurkirat Singh	Bhai Sulakhan Singh	Bhai Jajhar Singh A
9-1-14	Bhai Inderjit Singh	Bhai Davinder Singh	Bhai Jaspinder Singh	Bhai Gurkirat Singh	9-1-14	Bhai Onkar Singh	Bhai Sukhbir Singh	Bhai Harjitpal Singh	Bhai Gurwinder Singh
10-1-14	Bhai Kamail Singh	Bhai Inderjit Singh	Bhai Dalbir Singh	Bhai Jagtar Singh	10-1-14	Bhai Lakhwinder Singh	Bhai Jagdeep Singh	Bhai Onkar Singh	Bhai Bhupinder Singh
11-1-14	Bhai Davinder Singh	Bhai Lakhwinder Singh	Bhai Ravinder Singh	Bhai Manjit Singh	11-1-14	Bhai Kamaljit Singh	Bhai Jaspinder Singh	Bhai Sukhwinder Singh	Bhai Sulakhan Singh
12-1-14	Bhai Jagtar Singh	Bhai Satnam Singh	Bhai Manjit Singh	Bhai Jagdeep Singh	12-1-14	Bhai Randhir Singh	Bhai Gurwinder Singh	Bhai Jujhar Singh	Bhai Narinder Singh
13-1-14	Bhai Gurkirat Singh	Bhai Ravinder Singh	Bhai Kamail Singh	Bhai Sukhbir Singh	13-1-14	Bhai Tarbalbir Singh	Bhai Sukhwinder Singh	Bhai Harcharan Singh	Bhai Dharamveer Singh
14-1-14	Bhai Onkar Singh	Bhai Jagtar Singh	Bhai Balwinder Singh L	Bhai Gurwinder Singh	14-1-14	Bhai Dalbir Singh	Bhai Sulakhan Singh	Bhai Jagdeep Singh	Bhai Manjit Singh

Figure 16: Ragi duties at the Harimandir Sahib Jan 1-14, 2014, posted bi-monthly on sgpc.net

While the musicians at the Harimandir Sahib are lauded as representing the pinnacle of Gurbani Kirtan production and upholding the spiritual-aesthetic standard, there is a dearth of contemporary Hazoori Ragis with indepth knowledge of traditional raag kirtan. However, due to the revivalist efforts of the last two decades, today ragis at the Harimandir Sahib are asked to sing in raag accompanied by hired *dilruba* players.<sup>187</sup> While efforts are being made to restore stringed instruments and raags at the Harimandir Sahib, I spoke with Hazoori Ragis who mentioned that it is sometimes difficult to play with these dilruba accompanists, questioning

<sup>187</sup> Currently seven out of the nine dilruba players are students of Professor Kartar Singh (Gurmat Sangeet Academy, Anandpur Sahib), while one is a student of Dr. Gurnam Singh (Gurmat Sangeet Department, Punjabi University, Patiala). In 2006 Professor Kartar Singh, Dr. Gurnam Singh, Bhai Avtar Singh (11<sup>th</sup> generation exponent) and others were invited to revive the playing of *tanti saaj* (stringed instruments) at Harimandir Sahib. On March 6, 2006 *The Tribune Chandigarh* mentions “The Golden Temple ambience today resonated with Gurbani Kirtan performed with ancient and traditional musical instruments for the first time after partition.” Stating that Gurbani Kirtan was performed with two tanpuras, taus, swarmandal and harmonium. “Dr. Gurnam Singh...will also perform on March 7 & 8. Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa and Bhai Gurmit Singh Shant will perform kirtan on March 9-10 and March 16-17 respectively. Bhai Avtar Singh will perform on March 18.” The article further stated the decree that a dilruba would from now on accompany ragis at Harimandir Sahib. “Mr. Avtar Singh, President of the SGPC also enjoyed the kirtan. He said the committee would ensure that at least one raagi adept in traditional instruments was present during the kirtan in the sanctum sanctorum... He said students were being trained at Punjabi University [with Dr. Gurnam Singh] and the SGPC-run Sangeet Academy at Anandpur Sahib on traditional instruments [with Prof. Kartar Singh].” (*The Tribune Chandigarh*, Tuesday March 7, 2006 by Pawan Kumar) (<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060307/punjab1.htm>)

either the proficiency of the ragi or accompanist when playing raag-based kirtan. Due to the varying levels of musical proficiency, I ask Bhai Narinder Banarsi how ragis are able to gain employment at Darbar Sahib. He responds:

*There is a kirtan subcommittee –this is what it is called... The SGPC has a kirtan subcommittee to select ragis. This is for all [Gurdwara] places in Punjab, but not in Delhi. [They] have their own Gurdwara Committee [DGPC] - they are separate... (Recorded interview, April 24, 2011.)*

He further addresses the fact that while there is a subcommittee of knowledgeable musicians who hire professional ragis at Harimandir Sahib based on specific criteria, still the spiritual-aesthetic standard is not being upheld.

*The standard has become low. The proper people are not selected. The subcommittee has a standard – they have a paper form to fill from. What is age, qualification (school and sangeet), to be filled up by the contestant. What raags of SGGS have you learned, how many taals can you play, from where you have taken training, about 15-16 columns. When they fill it up we come to know what he knows.*

*But according to this there are not so many people who can pass the test, because when we read the papers we come to know who is eligible. One hundred applications come for selection, but when we see full performer - we don't select those – they only write that they know this and this, but we ask them to sing what they know, but they can't sing properly, then we say no. This is the method of selecting a ragi... (Recorded interview, April 24, 2011.)*

While the scholarship of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara was extensive and held to a high-level of scholarship, modern Gurbani Kirtan has lacked such patronage and instead has become political. Thus it has been stigmatized as a musical genre sung by uneducated musicians who market their music for commercial popularity. Today, Gurbani Kirtan is swayed by popular taste over musical proficiency, due in large part to shifting pedagogy and patronage from the guru-shishya parampara to institutionalized or self-taught education; and from the highly-esteemed musicians of courtly patronage to the professional ragi hired by the SGPC to sing in the historic Gurdwaras and sold in the public marketplace.

Dr. Nivedita Kaur Singh<sup>188</sup> points to the importance of institutional patronage in the maintenance of a certain level of musical proficiency.

*All the ragis who sing in the Gurdwaras, they are employed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandakh Committee. So it is a big duty of the organization to tell them that we need this type of kirtan, that they have to do this type of kirtan. If they make it mandatory that kirtan has to be in the raags, then all the ragis are going to do it sooner or later. But since they know that there is no such compulsion, then okay, as we say in Punjabi “ka(n)m chakra hai.” Fine, okay we are getting salary, it is okay. (Recorded interview, Punjabi University, Patiala, April 21, 2011.)*



Figure 17: Dr. Nivedita Kaur Singh in her office at the Music Department, Punjabi University, Patiala. Photo by author.

---

<sup>188</sup> Dr. Nivedita Kaur Singh is a Sikh woman, Gurbani Kirtan and Hindustani classical music performer and teacher in the Music Department at Punjabi University, Patiala. She is a student of Prof. Tara Singh and sister of Dr. Alankar Singh.

Overall, the lack of patronage and respect given to Gurbani Kirtan has filtered down to the institutions and ragis. Centers of learning were initially created to preserve musical memory and train qualified devotional musicians. However, today the institutional format has suffered by having to respond to the market as patron, churning out ragis to gain employment at a Gurdwara whether in India or the diaspora.<sup>189</sup>

*The purpose of these Vidyala-s was never to create a pedagogic model which would help the tradition to live on, and even flourish - the graduates were just trained to be able to undertake the Gurudwara rituals... These places have focused on their creations - their concoctions without ever enthusiastically endeavouring to imbibe the memory of the Gurbani Sangeet tradition, first without which one is not introduced to the traditions' perspective, logic and philosophy and the due attendance of its protagonists. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication, Sep 18, 2013.)*

#### **4.1.3 The Modern Institutionalization of Gurbani Kirtan Education**

Due to changing patronage structures, traditionally educated kirtaniya musicians had to tailor their music to cater to the new tastes of the diverse purchasing public. Many became educators at musical schools such as vidyala institutions of learning, colleges, and universities. Teaching in musical institutions can be seen as antithetical for those teachers who themselves underwent the traditional guru-shishya educative process because of the way students are ushered through a standardized educative system without enough time for specialized attention to develop a student's musical expertise. While there are teachers at these institutions who try to uphold the high parameter of musical education, it is difficult in the modern day environment where time constraints and financial requirements are placed on the students and institutions. Students have pressures from their families to go through a program quickly so they can enter the work force and gain employment as a ragi to support their family and ensure their marriage

---

<sup>189</sup> I was even told by a prominent ragi that many bribe their way in to be employed as Hazoori Ragis at Harimandir Sahib.

prospects. Due to economic factors students are unwilling or unable to spend the ten to fifteen years it takes to reach a level of musical excellence and proficiency when, through the musical institutions, they can invest an average of four years and be near guaranteed employment as a ragi in a Gurdwara.

Late Principal Dyal Singh<sup>190</sup> (Head Teacher at the Gurmat Vidyalā, Rakab Ganj Gurdwara, New Delhi)<sup>191</sup> expressed to me that the lack of patronage is the reason that ragis today are not motivated to learn stringed instruments, both because it takes more dedicated time to learn as well as the fact that it would cost more money for the Gurdwara management to pay for

---

<sup>190</sup> Principal Dyal Singh (1934-2012) taught students Gurbani Kirtan at the DGCP run Gurmat Vidyalā, Rakab Ganj Gurdwara in New Delhi from 1967-2012. He himself spent five years studying at this vidyalā under the tutelage of his teacher Gyani Hardit Singh (1946-51), after which time in 1952 he joined the jetha of renowned Bhai Samund Singh as his dilruba accompanist. From 1954-1958 he worked with Gian Singh Abbotabad (b. 1897) and renowned Rababi Bhai Tabba (who had been in Pakistan) documenting more than 200 compositions in over 60 raags from the Rababi tradition, which became part of Bhai Gian Singh Abbotabad's seminal two-volume books on Sikh musicology *Gurbani Sangeet* (1961). From 1959-1964 Principal Dyal Singh was employed at Harimandir Sahib playing dilruba for the morning Asa di Var and evening Sodar chaunkis. Principal Dyal Singh authored six books on Gurmat Sangeet and Tabla-Mridang. These books included ancient shabd-reetes, *partaals* (multi-rhythm compositions), *guldastas* (multi-rhythm and multi-raag compositions). His knowledge of the tradition can be noted throughout his books through the terminology, commentary given with notations, and recognition that the parampara memory-bearers may have sung multiple structures (saroops) of each raag. (Some information taken from <http://gurmatangeet.blogspot.com/2012/03/sage-of-rakab-ganj.html>)

<sup>191</sup> Principal Dyal Singh explains the history of the Gurmat Vidyalā: “*This vidyalā has been here 80 years. 2011 was the 81st year. My ustad taught for 36 years and now I teach. Only 2 ustads have taught here. If you change around teachers it won't work out. Learn from one teacher, so that gharana will be his specialty. The students who come here are not from the city, they are from the villages... This rehkhāb ganj school is here to teach these people from those villages [in the Uttar Pradesh (UP)]. 1901 the Rehkhāb Ganj sold land off to the English government and gave money to mahants and took over land. Sardar Bahadar Dharam Singh {one of the contractors} he was a sevadar of Sant Attar who inspired Dharam to take money and buy a mountain of white marble to construct the Gurdwara. He had this trust, and from that trust they give scholarship to students to study. These students are from the villages, and they didn't have kesh, sahadhari, but are coming out to learn. They become Sikhs and learn Kirtan. We are doing a good job by teaching them and inspiring them to become Sikhs, and they will serve once they become ragis. Of my students 50-60 have gone to America, Canada, England, Australia, Delhi, Patna Sahib, other places. We are helping these kids learn so they have a profession to support themselves. They are learning khula bol [open-handed playing on the jori] gat bol [closed-hand playing on the tabla] not tanti saaj [stringed instruments] because takes a really long time, only dilruba [simple stringed instrument].*” (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, April 2, 2011.)



a fourth musician as an addition to the contemporary three-person ragi jatha, and without extra funding, the musicians would have to further divide their earnings.<sup>192</sup>

*[Today] they make a jetha with two on the harmonium and one tabla. It takes a lot of hard work to do big taals and raags. Even if they mess up they have to practice everyday. The old ragis they would all live together and would practice a lot together... If someone doesn't want to learn how can I force them? ... If someone doesn't want to learn harmonium, then how will they want to learn dilruba? Is harder work.*

*[These days] they don't have the fourth person in the group to play dilruba. If they did, they would have hard time finding work. It is difficult to have four*



Figure 18: Students practicing outside of the Gurmat Vidyala, at Rakab Ganj Gurdwara, Delhi. Principal Dyal Singh signing the books he wrote on Gurmat Sangeet. Photos by author.

<sup>192</sup> The lack of funding and patronage now given to the vidyalas and the ragis can be seen in the disrepair of the classroom instruments, buildings, and materials. I particularly witnessed this at the Rakab Ganj Gurdwara's *Gurmat Vidyala* in Delhi where students were made to use old, broken harmoniums and tablas. The mere state of the instruments illustrated to me the lack of respect and care given by institutional patrons to Gurbani Kirtan, it's training centers, musicians, and teachers.

*people in a group because then four people have to divide the money. The Gurdwara Committee in Amritsar [SGPC] can afford to have the fourth person. Before, in the older times, there used to be four. They would have two vajas [harmonium], one dilruba, one tabla. People are getting greedy. (Principal Dyal Singh, recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, Gurmat Vidayala, Rakab Ganj Gurdwara, New Delhi, April 7, 2011.)*

Musical colleges, taksals, vidyalas, and departments at universities have a two to six year program with no requirement of prior musical training. Students come into these programs with a maximum education of up to twelfth class and often times little musical experience. Although consistent and individualized attention helps musicians achieve musical proficiency, such attention can be difficult to receive in these educational institutions due to the larger class sizes and programmatic constraints.

The vidyalas are boarding schools where students are mainly taught singing and Gurmat (Sikh ideology, history, exegesis), though some students in University and College settings also have to do regular academics. In particular, the Anandpur Sahib<sup>193</sup> and Rakab Ganj vidyalas are boarding schools with educated teachers who teach in a modified guru-shishya format with early morning *akaar* and raag scale practice. Students at the vidyalas learn compositions directly from their teachers, who consistently check their progress and make necessary corrections.<sup>194</sup>

---

<sup>193</sup> Once Professor Kartar Singh's students graduate the three-year program at the Gurmat Sangeet Academy, (they all enter and exit together) they are given placement by the SGPC in historic Gurdwaras around the Punjab or at Harimandir Sahib. He expressed his orthopraxic beliefs that sargams should not be sung in Gurbani Kirtan and he only sings Gurbani Kirtan with stringed instrument accompaniment, not with the harmonium. However, he does not find it transgressive for shabd-reets to have added words such as 'waho' to the bani, as has been denounced by other advocates of Gurmat Sangeet (see next chapter in relation to Prof. Surinder). Overall as a Gurmat Vidyalas it appears that there is a constant process of negotiation between traditional and institutionalized forms. (Singh, Professor Kartar, recorded interview, Gurmat Sangeet Academy, Anandpur Sahib, April 13, 2011.)

<sup>194</sup> I witnessed the class formats during my visits to both vidyalas.





Figure 19: Professor Kartar Singh at the Gurmat Sangeet Academy, Anandpur Sahib. Clockwise - signing books he has authored of his own compositions, teaching students, and playing kirtan at Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Baisakhi 2011. Photos by author.

However, programmatic constraints limit the training period to two-four years, pushing students into the ragi work force without a fully formed ability to grasp the complex intricacies of each raag. For example, the intonation of each swar is distinct and different per raag, as are the ways that the notes are touched upon in ascendance or descendance. Because of the high level of attention to detail required to gain a comprehensive grasp of one raag form, it is imperative that the student learns how to render multiple raag forms to differentiate one from another. Most institutions however focus primarily on a curriculum that teaches the thirty-one main raags and thirty-one *mishrat* (mixed) raags found in the Guru Granth Sahib and standardized by the Raag Nirnayak Committee in 1991-92 for the packaged consumption of students at these institutions.<sup>195</sup> However, to become proficient in the thirty-one raags requires the knowledge of how to render other raags to ensure that another raag form is not intruding in

<sup>195</sup> To be discussed in the following “Gurmat Sangeet” section.

the particular raag melody being sung. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2001) The musical proficiency needed to sing Gurbani Kirtan in raag takes much more than the two to four year program afforded most ragis. This period is viewed by guru-shishya pedagogy as a nascent time in which a student undergoing this process is building a strong musical foundation, and may not yet even be taught musical compositions but instead how to render the notes of the raags to ensure the words of the Gurbani are not burdened with unskillful discord and are instead enlivened through mellifluous mastery.

The late Principal Dyal Singh recognizes that he was only able to teach students for a short period, with the primary goal being to ensure that they learn the raags of the Guru Granth Sahib “*The students do kirtan at this Gurdwara [Rakab Ganj] and at Bangala Sahib [both in Delhi] in the evening and morning. I send them out after having learned for 2-3 years...My job is to teach the raags of Guru Granth Sahib.*” (April 2, 2011.) At the same time he acknowledged how the short-training period is incompatible with the commitment necessary to learn and imbibe the nuanced technicalities of the Gurbani Kirtan tradition:

*In two to four years you hardly understand the basics... People don't have enough time, aren't practicing, they are already doing basic kirtan and making money, so they don't have to go through a whole study... Older ragis used to remember so much, they had so much practice, it's not there anymore... but people don't want to do the work... Sangeet is a lifetime commitment. This is your personal reason to commit to this and be blissful and serve other people with music. It is just a commitment, the more practice you do, the better you get. If you quit or don't have enough practice you loose it. Your hand won't be that free or won't function properly {imitates drumming with his fingers}. Same with the vocals, if you don't practice everyday the rasa (fruitful essence) won't come. (Recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, April 2, 2011.)*

The achievement of musical mastery requires a lifetime commitment to dedicated learning and practice. However, the lack of devotion to musical education witnessed today appears to be a frustration both for teachers at the institutions as well as ragi musicians trained in

the traditional system as expressed by Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi (who was also taught by Prof. Kartar Singh): “*No one can devote his time to learning, no one. That is why we are missing tradition.*” (Recorded interview, April 24, 2011.) This sentiment was echoed by Professor Kartar Singh when I asked him why people with less training are given employment at the Harimandir Sahib. His diplomatic response did not refer to the SGPC’s role but rather placed responsibility with the musicians: “*People are not ready to work hard, everybody wants [to give] less effort and get more, everybody wants.*” (Recorded interview, April 13, 2011.) Dr. Nivedita Kaur Singh similarly expresses the lack of effort demonstrated by Hazoori Ragis at Harimandir Sahib, who are instructed to sing in the appropriate raag of their assigned *chaunki* session yet inevitably only do perfunctory renditions:

*Still now, when I listen to the kirtan telecast<sup>196</sup> from Sri Harimandir Sahib Ji, I always feel they sing one-two shabds in raags and then they switch on to their normal tunes. It means they are sort of doing this formality, okay, we have to sing one raag, let us do what we do, whatever we want to do.* (Recorded interview, April 21, 2011.)

Overall, there has been a lack of responsible patronage that only offers perfunctory training for ragis to perform the necessary Gurdwara duties, creating a system that does not support musical proficiency.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> The morning and evening chaunkis are telecast through Indian cable networks from the Harimandir Sahib to viewer’s homes throughout India and abroad.

<sup>197</sup> While the musical institutions lack in the specialized training, they have the benefit of making education widely available to people from divergent castes, classes, genders and creeds. However, currently only Khalsa-Sikh males are given the opportunity to have a respected career as an employed ragi in a historical Gurdwara in India, in one of the thousands of Gurdwaras worldwide, or even as one of thirty ragi jethas employed at the Harimandir Sahib. Many Gurdwaras worldwide employ ragi jethas to perform kirtan for daily worship and Sunday services although non-professional sangat congregation members are also able to perform kirtan. Male ragis are customarily employed by a local Sikh Gurdwara where they earn a salary along with room and board. It is noteworthy that to date women have not been employed as professional ragis in the Gurus’ courts, the Harimandir Sahib, or in local Sikh Gurdwaras although they continue to sing Gurbani Kirtan solo or in jatha ensembles.

Ragis are hired to perform life-cycle ritual ceremonies for a birth, marriage, or death, or for other ventures such as a new home or business. These ceremonies are held in the Gurdawara, homes of sangat

## 4.2 Contemporary Revival of “Traditional” Gurbani Kirtan

Due to the lack of spiritual-aesthetic scholarship within Gurbani Kirtan, over the last few decades some Sikh musicians have worked to revive and preserve traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan. These revivalists promote singing Gurbani Kirtan in raag, accompanied with traditional stringed instruments, with the goal of popularizing traditional Gurbani Kirtan within the Sikh community. Many teachers at the vidyalas and universities have also worked to validate Gurbani Kirtan as an independent musical genre worthy of being its own University department distinct from Hindustani Sangeet by institutionalizing a traditional Gurbani Kirtan genre, entitled *Gurmat Sangeet* or “music in the Guru’s way”.

The revival has been successful in that the majority of Sikhs are now aware that the great “intangible” treasure of Gurbani Kirtan had become near extinct within the last few generations, with a growing interest in learning and preserving their practice. There has also been increased scholarship related to the revival both within India and the Sikh Diaspora through publications, conferences, workshops, online courses, and rich discussions continue to be featured on Sikh websites, discussion forums and social-networking sites.<sup>198</sup> However, the transition from the past operative practice of the *Gurbani Kirtan parampara* to the normative form that has emerged as *Gurmat Sangeet* has not been a seamless one.

---

community members, or other venues where the Guru Granth Sahib is always present. Ragis also spend time traveling to different kirtan *darbar* and *samelan* gatherings. As a sign of respect for their service to the communal act of worship, ragis are also monetarily compensated by the sangat via donations given directly from the listeners during the kirtan performance. The role of the ragi is to impart the message of the Gurus’ *bani* to the sangat in a manner it can be easily understood and imbibed. To ensure the poetic hymns of the bani are being grasped by the sangat, ragis often give some *viakhiya*, (exposition on the meaning of the Gurbani) during their singing performance or give a *parman* (reference of a similar Gurbani line found in another shabd) to emphasize the message being conveyed.

<sup>198</sup> See the Facebook Debates in the Appendix to understand the diverse perspectives of the revival and what is at stake.

### 4.2.1 The Creation of “Gurmat Sangeet”: Institutionalizing an Independent Sikh Musical Identity

One of the main advocates of the institutionalization of Gurmat Sangeet<sup>199</sup> is Dr. Gurnam Singh (Head and Chair, Gurmat Sangeet Department, Punjabi University, Patiala). I spoke with him about the twenty-five year process it has taken to institutionalize “Gurmat Sangeet” as a distinct musical genre within the university system.<sup>200</sup> He credits his teacher, the late Professor Tara Singh (d. 1988), with the initial vision of propagating Gurmat Sangeet sung in the raags “prescribed”<sup>201</sup> by the Guru Granth Sahib, to standardized raag forms.

*I started learning classical music from Professor Tara Singh Ji in 1979, with his blessing, because he also has training from various classical vocalists. It was his dream to introduce Gurmat Sangeet as [an] academic discipline...For the promotion and establishment of Gurmat Sangeet as an academic discipline, we struggle[d] near about 25 years, at various university levels. (Singh, Dr. Gurnam, recorded interview, Gurmat Sangeet Department, Punjabi University, Patiala, April 21, 2011.)*

---

<sup>199</sup> Dr. Gurnam defines Gurmat Sangeet as follows: Guru = Granth, Mat = teaching and concepts (in the Granth) and Sangeet = music to influence the mind and soul.

<sup>200</sup> “In 1993 first of all we introduce[d] one current, Gurmat Sangeet in [the] syllabi in classical music, vocal, instrumental, and percussion at Guru Nanak Dev University, [Amritsar]. At that time I was heading [the] Department of music at Guru Nanak Dev University, that was our first venture, 1993...From that place [the] journey of Gurmat Sangeet as academic discipline has started. Then I came back to Punjabi University in 1997 and we started a diploma course in Gurmat Sangeet through distance education, and that was highly appreciated by all. In 1997 we also introduce[d] one-third Gurmat Sangeet in [the] syllabi of Hindustani classical music at [the] undergraduate and postgraduate level[s]... in 2003 we establish Gurmat Sangeet Chair here with financial aid of late Bibi Jasbir K. ji Khalsa...after that with the grace of Guru we became able to construct this beautiful Gurmat Sangeet bhavan to run activities for propagation of Gurmat Sangeet. And Then in 2004 we started independently MA, post graduate course in Gurmat Sangeet. Then after the success of this course, we started undergraduate course of Gurmat Sangeet in 2006. Along with these courses we also started some distance education course in Gurmat Sangeet... another success is we have introduced Gurmat Sangeet in our affiliated colleges at undergraduate level, at 5 colleges we are teaching Gurmat Sangeet.” (Singh, Dr. Gurnam, recorded interview, April 21, 2011.)

<sup>201</sup> The Guru Granth Sahib organizes the Gurbani hymns by raag-heading. Proponents of Gurmat Sangeet promote the orthopraxic view that Gurbani Kirtan should only be sung in the raag-heading (aka title-raag or prescribed-raag) of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Professor Tara and Dr. Gurnam Singh's interest in creating a unique Sikh musical voice from Hindustani Classical music within the modern university system, echoes the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century *Singh Sabha* reformists who had also worked to institutionalize a normative Sikh identity to not be subsumed within the Hindu majority.<sup>202</sup>

NK: *How do you feel Gurmat Sangeet or Gurbani Kirtan is perceived by Hindustani classical music? How has that perception been [in the past] and has it changed?*

Dr. Gurnam Singh: *If you see the history of Indian classical music from an academic perspective, in Punjab, music as a discipline started in the seventh decade [1970s] ...because music is a discipline of guru-shishya paramapara, and we don't have very well established academic tradition. When we teach Hindustani music we don't teach regional traditions,<sup>203</sup> we teach only raags and Hindustani classical singing style... And we Sikh musicians feel that our tradition has a great heritage of music, because Sri Guru Granth Sahib is in raags, we have different singing styles, instruments...we have so many compositions and [a] long process of performing kirtan but **we don't have any record of that kirtan.** Professor Tara Singh ji, Bhai Avtar Singh ji, Bhai Gurcharan Singh ji and other scholars...we have different schools of Gurmat Sangeet, called *taksals*. Those Kirtankar Ustads composed their shabd compositions and they taught these compositions to their students and they composed in notation system and published them in the form of books. (Emphasis added - recorded interview, April 21, 2011.)*

When attempting to parse apart the various aspects involved in the renaissance of “traditional” forms of Gurbani Kirtan (where the word *traditional* is inherently linked to notions of authenticity), it is important to distinguish between the various methodologies of knowledge

---

<sup>202</sup> One of Professor Tara Singh's teachers was LD Bhaghwat, who had learnt from the prominent 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c. Indian musical reformist Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (one of the first to democratize Indian classical music through public concerts, a notation system and by creating one of the first public musical institution in Lahore in 1901). Could Professor Tara Singh's interest in codifying and institutionalizing a Sikh musical identity be related to these late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century musical reformists?

<sup>203</sup> Dr. Gurnam Singh further explains that ‘Rabindra Sangeet in Bengal was the only one introduced as an academic discipline or an independent discipline by Tagore ji and Bengali people introduced that as a music system. But in Punjab, in north or in central India we don't have this kind of tradition.’ (Recorded interview, April 21, 2011.)

transmission, the types of knowledge being transmitted, as well as the historical structures and ideological apparatuses underlying the revival of such traditions. In the above statement it is interesting to note how Hindustani Classical music has dominated the North Indian musical and educational arena, causing those regional and devotional traditions to either become subsumed into its fold or disregarded as unworthy of institutionalized representation or acknowledgement. It sheds light on how and why normative definitions of Gurmat Sangeet continue to be promoted not only within the modern university system, but also within the Sikh community and throughout the greater sphere of Indian classical music.

In analyzing the previous statement “*we don’t have any record of that kirtan*” it also appears that the modern educational institutions deny the validity of Gurbani Kirtan’s orally transmitted and experientially embodied “*intangible*” heritage until recorded in the written form.<sup>204</sup> Dr. Gurnam Singh however does qualify the value of the Sikh’s *tangible* musical heritage as can be evidenced through the vast and diverse repertoire of Gurbani Kirtan which has been notated in publications since 1961.<sup>205</sup> The ideology that ascribes authenticity to compositions through the notated form however, is a problematic one. Notation can only offer a skeletal representation of the musical expression that lacks the specific nuanced qualities that deepen the musical expression of the bani.

Additionally, Dr. Gurnam’s previous statement refers to “different schools of Gurmat Sangeet, called taksals” and includes Bhai Avtar and Bhai Gurcharan Singh’s heritage as one among many even though they themselves do not claim their lineage as a taksal nor a *gharana*.

Any musical lineage can call itself a *gharana* after three generations of music in the family or as a student lineage. In my family we have been, apart from

---

<sup>204</sup> It is noteworthy that not all “intangible” knowledge was not under the purview of only one family or musical lineage. Instead, Gurbani Kirtan has a history of shared musical education as developed in the original taksals. Their exponents shared compositions and musical knowledge creating a communal culture of shared “intangible” memories.

<sup>205</sup> Bhai Gian Singh Abbotabad was the first to publish notated Gurbani Kirtan compositions in his book *Gurbani Sangeet* (1961).

other things, singing for 13 now with my cousin [uncle Bhai Kultar Singh] in the 12th generation. In 1989-90, when I began to learn formally, I was told to not call our family's discipline as our 'own gharana' - instead 'this is Guru Sahib's gharana'. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, Facebook debate, August 18, 2010.)

As eleventh generation memory-bearers, Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh were taught by the guru-shishya parampara passed down from teacher to student since the time of Guru Arjan Dev and have learned, remembered, and transmitted repertoire from the times of the Gurus' and a few compositions belonging to the Gurus themselves.<sup>206</sup> In this way they refer to their tradition as being part of the Guru's parampara that is attributed to the Guru's court and not to an individual person, institution, or location.<sup>207</sup> The vintage *shabd-reet* compositions remembered by their family contain a historic lineage of Sikh musical production over hundreds of years preserved and transmitted through oral traditions. In contrast, modern "taksals" stem from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the colonial era, such as the Hargana Taksal in Chamkaur started by Bhai Sampuran Singh, Professor Tara Singh's teacher. Even now there are modern Gurmat Sangeet schools that have named themselves as taksals such as the SGPC run Gurmat Sangeet Academy (Anandpur Sahib), the Gurmat Sangeet Vidyalya (Rakab Ganj, Delhi), Jawaddi Taksal (Ludhiana, Punjab) and the Gurmat Sangeet Department (Punjabi University, Patiala).<sup>208</sup> However, the term "taksal" historically referred to the *Girwari*, *Sekhwan* and

<sup>206</sup> The repertoire and raag forms have been notated in their two-volume *Gurbani Sangeet: Pracheen Reet Ratnavali* (1976).

<sup>207</sup> This fact contrasts with Dr. van der Linden's naming of the Bhai Avtar, Bhai Gurcharan, Bhai Kultar, Bhai Baldeep Singh hereditary line as being the "Baba Jwala Singh lineage" where they themselves would not subscribe to such labeling.

<sup>208</sup> Dr. Gurnam in his article "Sikh Musicology" lists the contemporary taksals as follows: 1. Damdama Sahib, Taksal, 2. Budha Jor Taksal, 3. Mastuana Taksal, 4. Taran Taran Taksal, 5. Damdami Taksal, 6. Daudher Taksal, 7. Singhwala Taksal, 8. Hargana Taksal, 9. Sewa Panthi Taksal, 10. Dumali Taksal, 11. Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar (S.G.P.C.), 12. Sikh Missionary College, Damdama Sahib (S.G.P.C.), 13. Kleran Wala Taksal, 14. Gurmat Vidyalya Rakabganj Taksal, 15. Yateem Khana Amritsar, 16. Soorma Ashram, Amritsar, 17. Jawadhi Kalan Taksal Ludhiana, 18. Gurmat Sangeet Academy Anandpur Sahib, 19. Gurmat Sangeet Study Circle Punjab, 20. Gurmat Sangeet Academy Punjab, 21. Gurmat Sangeet Society Patiala, 22. Amrit Kirtan Trust, Chandigarh, 23. Gurmat Sangeet Society, Chandigarh, 24. Gurmat College Delhi Gurdwara Management Board, 25. Punjabi University Patiala, 26. Gurmat College, Patiala etc. (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>)



*Amritsar* taksals<sup>209</sup> established by Bhai Dharam Singh (of Guru Gobind Singh's Panj Piyare) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who himself played the saranda. (Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 65) Most of the major Gurbani Kirtan exponents, both Sikh kirtaniya-ragis and rababis were either trained at these originary taksals, or taught by those same teachers in other locations, and then would themselves teach others, illustrating how the parampara has been diverse yet with common roots to the Guru's tradition. It therefore is important to note that rather than being dominated by any particular lineage, orally transmitted knowledge was shared between multiple sources.<sup>210</sup>

Additionally, the traditional taksals and deras differ greatly from the modern institutions due to the level of patronage they received aimed at producing high caliber Gurbani Kirtan exponents and scholars. It therefore becomes problematic when modern institutions that produce contemporary musicians are now appropriating and equating their modern versions with the authority of the originary taksals. As an example, Bhai Baldeep Singh responds to the modern naming of the "Tarn Taran Taksal," with Bhai Balbir Singh as the Head exponent. While Bhai Balbir Singh is an exponent from the institution at Tarn Taran, its roots connect further back than the school at Tarn Taran, linked to the originary taksals.<sup>211</sup>

*Bhai Balbir Singh's teacher was Pandit Nathu Ram, whose teacher was Bhai Butta Singh. He is the younger Gurbhai and duet singer along with Baba Sharda Singh whose taus is along with me. They are the second teachers of my great granduncle [Baba Jwala Singh] and my great grandfather. Baba Sharda Singh*

---

<sup>209</sup> Girwari can also be spelled *Gidwari*, in Hoshiarpur district, Sekhwan is pronounced with a nasalized 'n', located in the Firozpur district.

<sup>210</sup> The late Principal Dyal Singh's musical heritage stems from the same tree as Bhai Gurcharan Singh's. When visiting Principal Dyal Singh's Gurmat Vidyalā at Rakab Ganj Gurdwara in Delhi, I heard the students sing many shabd-reet compositions similar to the ones I had learnt from Bhai Baldeep Singh (Bhai Gurcharan Singh's grand-nephew). While both Principal Dyal Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh had different teachers, their grand-teachers Pt. Nathu Ram and Ust. Baba Sharda Singh (respectively) both studied at the vidyalā in Girwari and then at Sekhwan set up by Bhai Dharam Singh, of the Panj Piyare.

<sup>211</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh questions: "How can they call themselves "Tarn Taran School"? It's late 20th century or even 21st century fiction writing... How can they call it "our school"? ... They are retrospectively things..." (Recorded interview, Albuquerque, NM, July 4, 2013.)

*was the turban exchange of my great grandfather Baba Diwan Singh. I know the history and that is our off-shoot. How can they claim as a taksal? Just on the basis of Pt. Nathu Ram? Baba Sharda Singh and Baba Butta Singh are from the Sekhwan Taksal.... we are the only family surviving with all the three roots. We carry the memory of all three traditions [Sekhwan, Girwari, Amritsar]... if you want to write about the tradition, you must first learn the tradition. Otherwise you are going to be an outsider to it. You won't know it. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded interview, July 4, 2013.)*

Therefore an erasure of the past occurs when the labeling of “taksals” enables those contemporary institutions to equate themselves as one among many “taksals” and thus authenticate and authorize their teachings as such.

The modern appropriation of the “taksal” terminology has caused more hermeneutic chaos in the field, causing those like van der Linden to claim that Gurbani Kirtan has never been authentic. (2008) Bhai Baldeep Singh further explains:

My personal fight has been to prevent precisely such appropriations being ‘incorporated’ within the actual history of gurbani kirtan – which involves countering the very serious attempts to place contemporary music on the same pedestal with the last surviving material from the guru times. Contemporary scholars do not realize that contemporary music has its own important place and is in no way inferior to the old. Some new schools are being called taksals,<sup>212</sup> even when they do not yet even qualify as gharanas. The point is that, unless one is a bearer of gurbani kirtan having undergone an established pedagogy of a time-honoured practice of gurbani kirtan, one may be merely assuming. To shape the future of gurbani kirtan on the basis of mere assumptions, as has been attempted over the last two decades, is an error. (2011, 271)

Therefore by claiming one’s school as a “taksal” or “gharana”, contemporary Sikh musicians in turn equate their musicality that has been derived from modern sources with those originary sources, thus giving themselves authority to dictate orthopraxic prescriptions onto Sikh ragis and even tradition bearers. Problematically such prescriptions are often based on modern

---

<sup>212</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh’s original article gives a footnote stating how *gharanas* can be named as such after at least 3 generations, where a taksal can have many gharanas.

assumptions and reformist agendas, erasing the diversity and lived reality of past operative practices.

### 4.3 Orthopraxy

#### 4.3.1 Reforming and Institutionalizing Sikh Musical Practice

Though many revivalists hold differing opinions on how Gurbani Kirtan should be sung and revived, they are all working with the same intention - to bring to light the masterly Sikh musical heritage to invoke a sense of musical pride within the Sikh community and particularly in the next-generation whose role it is to preserve the genre. Dr. Gurnam Singh has approached this task by working within the institutionalized Indian classical music arena to develop a concrete Sikh musical identity with scientifically verifiable features such as a standardized notation system, raag forms, instrumentation, educational system, and rules for performance.

*Having this vast heritage we feel it should be an independent discipline of music, independent stream of music and we should teach this stream of music to our students in Punjab and especially to the Sikhs. And without establishing this tradition on the academic basis, **we can't do scientific study. We can't learn this.** As we have seen, there are so many people who are singing, who are performing, reciting, and teaching, they can speak well on this tradition, but **without the teaching and the research in universities, colleges, schools, you can't promote this subject as a complete academic, scientific discipline.** But we have to struggle to establish the tradition theoretically as well as practically as well as socially because we have to convince all our music faculty that Sikh music is an independent tradition, this is not part of Hindu devotional music or bhakti movement. This is an independent tradition of Gurmat Sangeet and our Guru is Shabd-Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and this tradition is completely based on the musicology of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Maryada code of conduct of Sikh Panth which has been developed by our holy Sikh Gurus and Sikh Sangat. (Singh, Dr. Gurnam, recorded interview, Punjabi University, Patiala, April 18, 2011.)*

Dr. Gurnam Singh's continued emphasis on the need for Gurmat Sangeet to be *scientifically studied* and viewed as an *independent tradition* reflects a similar discursive ideology espoused by Singh Sabha religious reformists during the Enlightenment episteme. In

favor of institutionalized reform, Gurmat Sangeet had to be developed into a normative object that could be scientifically studied and appropriated within the modern academic sphere. Included in its creation was the development of a “Sikh musicology” which necessitated standardized raag *saroop* forms, instrumentation specific to the Sikh tradition, and distinct musicological rules and orthopraxy “prescribed” by the documented authority of the Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh Rahit Maryada.<sup>213</sup> While the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikh Rahit Maryada contain useful frameworks, they do not fully account for operative practices. Dr. Gurnam does recognize the importance of both the theory (found in the Guru Granth Sahib) and practical (operative) practices of Gurbani Kirtan even though, through the process of institutionalization, some aspects have become normatively defined forgetting actual lived performative practice.

*Raag, rahao, ank, these signs and symbols [are] Sikh musicology. [But the] rules [are] not only binding to raags and rahaos, more than this the singing style, the kirtan chaunki, the traditional style, which we preserved and were inspired by our kirtankars. How they performed kirtan, that was practical tradition, and this is our theoretical base of our Sikh musicology. Our theory is based on musicology of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and our practical performance of kirtan is completely*

---

<sup>213</sup> It is important to note that the Siri Guru Granth Sahib does not notate raag forms, contains signs such as *chant* which have been forgotten by Indian classical music though remembered in Sikh practice, and even contains unknown signs such as *ghar* whose meaning has now been forgotten, illustrating the importance of memory transmission. Similarly, the Sikh Rahit Maryada is a 1950s product of Singh Sabha reformist ideology that contains normative definitions of Gurbani Kirtan excluding Rababis and other forms of musicality that have historically been a part of Gurbani Kirtan practice such as singing personally composed songs in praise of the Gurus, or adding lines to Gurbani which reformists have taken as proscribing added exclamations (such as, Wah! Pyare! Ji!) found in some vintage shabd-reet compositions.

Sikh Rahit Maryada: Chapter V, Article VI

- a) In the Sangat, Kirtan can only be done by a Sikh.
- b) Kirtan means singing Gurbani in traditional raag measures.
- c) In the sangat, Kirtan only of Gurbani (Guru Granth's or Guru Gobind Singh's hymns) and, for its elaboration, of the compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal, may be performed.
- d) It is improper, while singing hymns to rhythmic folk tunes or to traditional raag measures, or in team singing, to induct into them improvised and extraneous refrains. Only a line from shabd should be made a refrain. <[http://SGPC.net/rahit\\_maryada/section\\_three\\_chap\\_five.html](http://SGPC.net/rahit_maryada/section_three_chap_five.html)>

*based on the tradition which came from the Guru period and our kirtankars, Sikh music is a combination of both.* (Singh, Dr. Gurnam, recorded interview, Punjabi University, Patiala, February 22, 2012.)

Dr. Gurnam states that he and proponents of Gurmat Sangeet invest authority in both the traditional practices as well as the information contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. However, they inevitably deny the authenticity and authority of past operative practices by promoting standardized raag forms created by the *Raag Nirnayak Committee* (RNC) and by stating that Gurbani should only be sung in the prescribed title raags of the Guru Granth Sahib, whereas memory-bearers sing Gurbani Kirtan in various raags. Dr. Inderjit Kaur in her paper “Sikh Shabad Kirtan and Gurmat Sangit: What’s in the Name?” (2011) further questions Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy since the term “Gurmat” (in the Guru’s way) links itself to traditional practices and the authentic and authoritative origin of the Sikh Gurus, yet actually uses modern forms that erase past practices. She recognizes that most proponents of “Gurmat Sangeet” actually sing in the khayal genre, which was popularized in the post-Guru era of the 18<sup>th</sup> century royal courts, whereas in addition to folk genres, most of the Gurus sang in the devotional *dhrupad* genre (originating in the Vaishnava Bhakti temples)<sup>214</sup> which upholds Gurbani’s spiritual intent.<sup>215</sup> (Kaur, Inderjit 2011b 274) The predominant use of khayal within Gurmat Sangeet adds to the *kicharee* (mixture) of modern and traditional modes that have caused a “hermeneutic chaos” where traditional Gurbani Kirtan is being interpreted and reformed into a *Gurmat Sangeet* genre based on modern standards rather than on extant lived operative practices.

---

<sup>214</sup> See Meilu Ho 2006, 2013.

<sup>215</sup> Raja Mrigendra of Patiala explains the important difference between the devotional focus of Gurbani Kirtan as a temple, rather than courtly genre: “**NEVER** like unto any Indian *Hindu-Muslim* Imperial/princes courts entertaining music. **Rather** thrust remained Sacred, exclusive of Divinity’s Praise (*Bhagvad Kīrti*) singing old-New (*purātan-navtan*) Indo-Semitic-Guru-Bānī Holy Canonical PROSODIC MUSICAL theme go “hand in glove **with canonical prosodic music**’s thrust who’s purpose, aim and object was to attain Divinity’s Experience – it was **NEITHER** to entertain any **TEMPLE PARISH** (*sangat*); **NOR** was it unto any **Imperial/royal secular courts entertainment**. In fact it was in sharp contrast with the music played in Indian *Hindu-Muslim* Imperial/princely courts for entertainment purposes only. Sharp contrast with the music played in Indian *Hindu-Muslim* Imperial/princely courts for entertainment purposes only.” (Personal email communication, his emphases, May 8, 2012.)

In order for Gurmat Sangeet to be institutionalized within modern academia, operative practices became subsumed under normative definitions based on the “theory” of the Guru Granth Sahib. The Gurbani is organized in the Guru Granth Sahib under raag heading and has been used as an initial prescription for Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy, even though historically each Gurbani hymn has been composed in multiple raags. To promote the singing of Gurbani Kirtan in prescribed raags, it became imperative to standardize and notate the raag *saroop* forms to institutionalize this particular Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy.

#### 4.3.2 The Raag Controversy: Standardization and Authentication

In 1991 Sant Sucha Singh of Jawaddi Taksal, Ludhiana,<sup>216</sup> not himself a musician, invited knowledgeable Sikh musicians to create standardized Sikh raag forms as part of the *Raag Nirnayak Committee* (RNC).<sup>217</sup> Professor Alankar Singh (Department of Music, Punjabi University)<sup>218</sup> recounts how the RNC was created:

*In 1991 when the first Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan, was organized in Ludhiana at Jawaddi Taksal, here was [the late] Baba Sucha Singh there, the saint... He initiated this thing... One day Baba Sucha Singh Ji along with Bibi Jasbir Kaur Khalsa went to Principal Satbir Singh Ji's house. They wanted to do something, that kirtan is not being done in the traditional way. So Prin. Satbir Singh ji suggested that Prof. Tara Singh has devoted all his life to this noble*

---

<sup>216</sup> Jawaddi Taksal was founded by the late Sant Baba Sucha Singh (b. 1948-d. 2002) and holds Gurmat Sangeet classes by donation taught by Principal Sukhwant Singh. The current head of Jawaddi Taksal, Sant Giani Amir Singh, runs the Gur Gian Parkash Gurdwara on the Jawaddi Taksal campus. I have had the opportunity to visit Jawaddi Taksal a few times and was overwhelmed by the hospitality, kindness, and serviceful presence of their Head, Principal, and Baba Sohan Singh Ji. While this dissertation unpacks the issues that have come with the process of standardizing Sikh raag forms, as initiated by Sant Sucha Singh at Jawaddi Taksal, this is not to detract from the value of their consistent commitment to honoring Sikh musicians, scholars, and the Sikh sangat through their service, teaching, and sammelan gatherings. ([www.vismaadnaad.org](http://www.vismaadnaad.org)) Instead these issues are raised to point towards the consequences of reform for an opening towards dialogue that can co-create the future of Gurbani Kirtan.

<sup>217</sup> The RNC was organized with the help of the late Bibi Jasbir Kaur Khalsa, whose Gur Gian Parkash foundation eventually funded the Gurmat Sangeet department at Punjabi University.

<sup>218</sup> Prof. Alankar is currently authoring a book on his teacher, the late Professor Tara Singh.



Figure 20: (Clockwise) Jawaddi Taksal Gurdwara; Sant Sucha Singh; Principal Sukhwant Singh teaching; Students playing Gurbani Kirtan; Sant Giani Amir Singh. Photos by author and Sant Sucha Singh photo courtesy of Jawaddi Taksal.

*cause so why don't you adopt this, **you should try to get all the ragis to sing in these raags**, in these phrases, matlab, 'saroops banai hai na!?''*

*So Prin. Satbir Singh ji gave us this noble idea and Dr. Gurnam Singh was also there. So Baba Ji, it clicked in his mind that yeah, we should do like this. So now the main problem was that Prof. Tara Singh had given his opinion. He included the facts.<sup>219</sup> But there were other musicians also, some of the raags they agreed, "yeah this is right," but some of them, there were some, not some, **there were many**, how do you say, mat bayd bahot hagai se apas vich. **They didn't consider that all the raags mentioned by Prof. Tara Singh were correct.** So the Raag Nirnayak Committee was formed. "Nirnayak" is to take a decision about the exact notes of the raags. This was before the first Adutti Gurmat Sangeet*

<sup>219</sup>Professor Alankar Singh mentions that Prof. Tara Singh cross-referenced his raag forms from different sources. "He has not only given the raags, but gives the references, that Bhai Khan Singh Nabha has mentioned this, so this is agreed upon opinion. His writing is scientific, gives the pros and cons." (Recorded interview, Music Department, Punjabi University, Patiala, April 21, 2011.)

*Sammelan. For months and months they were meeting.* (Singh, Professor Alankar, recorded, Music Department, Punjabi University, Patiala, April 21, 2011.)

While there were many disagreements about the *saroop* (form or structure) of the raags, Professor Alankar Singh explained to me that at the first 1991 meeting they finally came to a consensus on the thirty-one raag forms.<sup>220</sup> In 1992 the RNC reconvened with a large contingency of those affiliated with Professor Tara Singh, including his student Dr. Gurnam Singh as well as his gurbhai (brother-in-learning) Ustad Jaswant Singh Bhamwra, Dr. Gurnam Singh's elder brother Dr. Jagir Singh, along with Bhai Balbir Singh and Sikh classical Hindustani musicians the brothers Pandit Tejpal and Surinder Singh Bandhu, and Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal. Renowned Hindustani classical musician Pandit Dilip Chandra Vedi (b.1901-d.1992) and traditional memory-bearers Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh were also in attendance in ceremonial capacities. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 275)

When looking at who was in attendance to standardize the raag forms, it is important to note how their pedagogy, with their underlying habitus, informed their decisions on the “correct” raag forms. For example, both Professor Tara Singh and Ustad Jaswant Singh Bhamwra had studied from Bhai Sampuran Singh, Hargana Taksala, near Chamkaur who along with Pandit Dilip Chandra Vedi were disciples of the legendary Bhai Uttam Singh of *Talwandi gharana*.<sup>221</sup> Pandit Tejpal and Surinder Singh Bandhu as well as Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal studied khayal-gayaki from the renowned Ustad Amir Khan of *Lucknow gharana*. Noteworthy although Bhai Balbir Singh had learned from many Sikh tradition bearers, he believed that the raag forms should be standardized according to Bhatkhande's versions. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 275) Overall the musicians in attendance were authorities in their respective fields, but their perspectives were

---

<sup>220</sup> Visit <http://www.vismaadnaad.org/formationofraagselectioncommittee.php> for Principal Sukhwant Singh's (Jawaddi Taksal) for a detailed explanation of how the raag forms were decided. And visit <http://www.vismaadnaad.org/Adutti-Gurmat-Sangeet-samellan-1991-video.php> for videos from the first Audi Gurmat Sangeet Samelan in 1991.

<sup>221</sup> Bhai Uttam Singh of Talwandi Gharana is not the same “Bhai Uttam Singh” as Dr. Gurnam's father.



informed by mainstream Indian “classical” music, and not necessarily informed by the Gurbani Kirtan parampara itself. Bhai Baldeep Singh importantly notes that although there are few remaining memory-bearers of the parampara, those who remain, agree that there can be a variety of raag forms.

One needs to understand how the kirtan tradition has been sustained and whether efforts have been made to standardize or create some sort of uniformity in kirtan. I have been personally amazed to see that, among the older known bearers of kirtan, be it the Muslim rababis of Lahore or the Gur-Sikh kirtaniye living in India and other parts of the world, there seems to be no anomaly regarding the raag forms. The discrepancies that exist are seen in the music exponents whose basic training in music has been from the mainstream Indian classical music tradition. This ‘mainstream classical music’ draws its logic from the music tradition of the erstwhile Mughal and non-Mughal princely courts of India. (2011, 275)

Thus illustrating that such knowledge was historically open to diversity and communally shared, not subject to one lineage. Instead it is the contemporary process of standardization, filtered through contemporary Hindustani Sangeet, that has imposed normative definitions onto traditional practices, creating discrepancies in the field.

It was at the 1992 gathering that the RNC codified an additional thirty-one *mishrat* (mixed) raag forms found in the Guru Granth Sahib, resulting in a total of sixty-two standardized raags of Gurmat Sangeet. Professor Alankar Singh noted that the committee agreed to use 77% of Professor Tara Singh’s raag forms which he had compiled from various sources. (Recorded interview, April 21, 2011.) This raises the question of which sources were deemed authoritative in the creation of the remaining 23% of the RNC raag forms in addition to Prof. Tara Singh’s various sources? Were they the raag forms learnt by those who had studied Hindustani classical music? Those from notations created during the turn of the century reformist era such as Bhatkhande? Those passed down over generations by the Gurbani Kirtan parampara? Or based on personal opinion and created in the name of standardization?

Dr. Gurnam in the book *Sikh Musicology* (2001) further identifies the sources used by the Raag Nirnayak Committee to “determine the original Raagas of Shri Guru Granth Sahib in their authentic form.” (vi-vii)

1. Practical Raaga forms in vogue, travelling down the generations in Gurmat Sangeet tradition. [ie. memory of parampara]
2. The Raaga forms mentioned in the Gurus’ contemporary books on Indian Music.
3. The Raaga forms as propounded by different scholars of Sikh Music in various books.
4. The Raaga forms in the musical notations of the *Raagis*, *Rababis* and other *Sikh Kirtankaras*.<sup>222</sup>
5. The forms prevalent in the contemporary Indian Classical music. [ex. Bhatkhande]
6. Raaga forms determined by the *Raaga Nirnayak Committee*.

Dr. Gurnam recognizes that within Sikh music there are multiple authenticating sources that contain a diversity of raag forms,<sup>223</sup> while further illustrating that Sikh music was uniquely derived

---

<sup>222</sup> Listed by Dr. Gurnam Singh in his article “Raag Parbandh of Sri Guru Granth Sahib” as “1. Gur Girarath Kosh (Pt. Tara Singh Narotam) 2. Gur Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh (Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha) 3. Gurmat Sangeet Par Hun Mili Khoj (Dr. Bhai Charan Singh) 4. Gurbani Sangeet (part first & second) (Giyani Singh Abtabad Singh) 5. Gurmat Ratan Sangeet Bhandar (Bhai Prem Singh) 6. Gurmat Sangeet (Master Sunder Singh) 7. Gurmat Sangeet Mala (Master Mohan Singh) 8. Gurbani Sangeet Pracheen Reet Ratnavli (Dr. Bhai Avtar Singh, Gurcharan Singh) 9. Shri Guru Granth Sahib Rag Ratnavli (Prof. Tara Singh) 10. Adi Granth Raag Kosh (Dr. Gurnam Singh) 11. Sur Simran Sangeet (part first & second) (Sant Sarwan Singh Gandharb) 12. Guru Nanak Sangeet Padhti Granth (Rag Nirnaik Committee) 13. Gurmat Sangeet Vishesh Ank Vismad Nad (Jawadi Kalan Taxsal) 14. Vadan Sagar (Kanwan Mirgender Singh) 15. Kramik Pustak Malina Edition First and six (Pt. Vishnu Narayan Sharma) 16. Rag Kosh (Vasant) 17. Marfin Nagmat (Raja Nawab Ali) 18. Sawar Mela Klanidhi (Ramamatye) 19. Sangeet Darpan (Pt. Damodar) 20. Sangeet Parijat (Pt. Abobhal)” (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>)

<sup>223</sup> Dr. Gurnam in his article “Raag Parbandh of Sri Guru Granth Sahib” notes that they have found: “146 different variations of 31 main Raagas and 31 sub-Raagas of Sri Guru Granth Sahib from the above mentioned sources. [see previous footnote] 1. Siree-two, 2. Maajh-five, 3. Gaoree-six, 4. Gaoree Guaaoree-three, 5. Gaoree Dakhani-one, 6. Gaoree Chetee-three, 7. Gaoree Bairaagan-four, 8. Gaoree deepkee-three, 9. Gaoree Poorbee Deepkee-one, 10. Gaoree Poorbee-one, 11. Gaoree Majh-five, 12. Gaoree Malwa-four, 13. Gaoree Malla-five, 14. Gaoree Sorath-three, 15. Aassa-one, 16. Aasaawaree-one, 17. Aasaavaree Sudhang-one, 18. Aasaa Kaafee-two, 19. Goojree-one, 20. Devgandhaaree-four, 21. Devgandhar-four, 22. Bihaagrhaa-two, 23. Wadhans-four, 24. Wadhans Dakhane-one, 25. Sorath-one 26. Dhanaasree-two, 27. Jaitsaree-one, 28. Todee-one, 29. Bairaree-one, 30. Tilang-one, 31. Tilang Kaafee-two, 32. Soohi-two, 33. Soohi Kaafee-two, 34. Soohi Lalit-two, 35. Bilaawal-one, 36. Bilaawal Kakhane-one, 37. Bilaawal Mangal-one, 38. Gond -one, 39. Bilaawal Gond-three, 40. Raamkalee-two, 41. Raamkalee Dakhane-two, 42. Nat Naaraain-five, 43. Nat-four 44. Maalee Gaoraa-one, 45. Maaroo-five, 46. Maaroo kaafee-one, 47. Maaroo Kkhnhee-one 48. Tukharee-two, 49. Kedaaraa-two, 50. Bhairao-

from a confluence of Mughal-Hindustani-Bhakti forms yet at the same time safeguarded in this multi-dimensional “original form” by Kirtaniakaras, unaffected by Hindustani standardization.

Sikh music was a contemporary tradition of the Mughal period of Hindustani music... The Raagas prevailed in both the traditions but due to the difference of spiritual and artistic purposiveness, a lot of difference in the forms of singing also came to the forefront. And it was due to this that Sikh music came to be established in its original form... The Kirtaniakaras of the abode of Guru kept the traditional forms of Raagas intact by keeping themselves immune from the changes that affected Shudh Thaats from Kafi scale's notes into Bilawal scale's notes...” (Singh, Dr. Gurnam 2001, vi)



Figure 21: Sant Sucha Singh showing traditional Sikh instruments to the crowd gathered for the first Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan, Jawaddi Taksal, Ludhiana 1991. Photo courtesy of Jawaddi Taksal.

one, 51. Basant-five, 52. Basant Hindol-four, 53. Saarang-four, 54. Malaar-four, 55. Kaanrhaa-four, 56. Kaliaan-one, 57. Kaliaan Bhopaalee-one, 58. Prabhaatee-three, 59. Prabhaatee Dakni-one, 60. Prabhaatee Bibhaas-two, 61. Bibhaas Prabhaatee-two, 62. Jaijaavantee-one. In these Raagas, Raag Majh, Gauri, Bairarai, Soohi, Tukhari, etc. are not prevalent in the Indian traditional of Raagas. In addition to this, different forms of Raag Gauri, Asa, Soohi, Maru, Parbhathi and different forms of Dakhni Raagas like Gauri Dakhni, Bilawal Dakhni, Ramkali Dakhni etc. are also not prevalent in Hindustani music.” (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>)

Though Dr. Gurnam appears to recognize the unique nature of the raag forms found in Gurbani Kirtan, the diversity of authenticating sources however became problematic when the RNC attempted to create standardized versions.

Bhai Baldeep Singh recalls how, while in attendance at the RNC as an observer, he “saw that different ‘like-minded’ musicians sat together and put together newer raag forms by blending a few raag versions (of one particular raag) together into one composite raag form” or even attempted to create new forms altogether.<sup>224</sup> (2011, 276) Problematically by working to institutionalize an independent “Gurmat Sangeet” genre, many of the raag forms created by the RNC were either a *kicharee* of extant forms or were newly created. Rather than accepting the diversity inherent in the genre, these newly codified raag forms were then presented to the Sikh community as the official Sikh raag forms at the 1992 and 1993 *Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan* conference at Jawaddi Taksal (Ludhiana, India).

The process of standardization has enabled “Sikh” raag forms to be taught in institutional settings and packaged for the next generation of professional ragis, semi-professional musicians and Gurmat Sangeet teachers. However, it has had a negative effect on extant operative practices “when the RNC active members and convener tried to impose their raag forms upon the tradition bearers. This imposition would have meant a total shift from how Gurbani had been sung for

---

<sup>224</sup> As an observer at the RNC, Bhai Baldeep Singh recalls an attempt to create a new *raag ramkali anand*. “In a meeting held in Baba Sucha Singh’s room in the Summer of 1992, at which Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh invited me to stand in for them, Dr Gurnam Singh proposed that raag ramkali anand be considered a raag. Bhai Balbir Singh Ragi immediately enquired about the form of this raag, to which Dr Gurnam Singh responded by saying that a few interested members of the RNC could sit together and put together a raag form and its structure. This brought my first major intervention. I responded by saying that in gurbani kirtan tradition no such raag exists. Gurnam’s thesis was that, as there are other parentheses in gurbani, such as gauri bhi sorath bhi, bilaval gond and suhi lalit, among others, so, from the parenthesis of raag ramkali mahla 3 anand, raag ramkali anand may be formed, as anandi is a raag found in Indian classical music. I argued that there are other parentheses in guru bani that should then also be considered as raag forms, but that actually the term anand was the title of the composition by Guru Amar Das and differs from anandi (Indian raag). Gurnam asked Baba Sucha Singh to decide on this matter who gave his verdict in favour of my arguments.” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 276)

centuries and how it should be sung from now on.”<sup>225</sup> (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 276) Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian (whose family has historically been patrons of traditional kirtanias and rababis) recognizes the problems that have arisen when trying to institutionalize and in effect replace traditional forms with a standardized “Gurmat Sangeet”.

*The thing is Gurmat Sangeet is Shabd Kirtan, [Punjabi University] Patiala likhdha nay [writes] “Gurmat Sangeet”, how can you say that? There is no school that says [this]. They [the Gurus] didn’t write that [raag] kalyan structure is five notes or seven notes or nine notes, he [Guru Arjan] didn’t write any of those things. And if one traditional composition, one raag in one [shabd-] reet does not sound like any raag of today, I am very comfortable with it. Because the same raag in two different or three different Indian music gharanas is sung differently, their movements are different, so? They [Punjabi University] get people to interpret what should be the structure of [raag] tukhari. “Nahi ye, madhvanti hai, ni hai” [this isn’t it, this is raag madhvanti, it has a “ni”] Forget it, just see the old compositions and try to define them in your lexicon and say, well this is the tukhari of the old. Don’t recreate them. (Recorded interview, Feb 23, 2012.)*

The Gurbani Kirtan parampara remembers, teaches, and sings raag forms and their variations that are particular to Gurbani Kirtan as well as raags not sung in Hindustani classical music such as *raag Tukhari*. Unfortunately most of the Sikh musicians on the RNC had not learned these raag forms because they did not study from the Gurbani Kirtan tradition bearers whose shabd-reet compositions contain the musical information of how to render such “forgotten” raag forms. Because of this, the outcome of the RNC were “Sikh” raag forms based

---

<sup>225</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh recalls an example of enforcing the modern standardized raag forms onto the tradition bearers. “In 1996, the Aduti Gurmat Sangeet Sammellan was to be held at Hazur Sahib, Nanded, in Maharashtra. Bhai Avtar Singh decided to sing some very special ancient shabad-reet set to raag Tukhari, Vadhans and Majh. Bhai Avtar Singh told me that he had received a telephone call from Professor Kartar Singh in Ludhiana, asking him to change the raag forms of these ancient shabad-reet by conforming to the raag forms set by the RNC. Bhai Avtar Singh refused to do so, saying that the ancient repertoire had never been modified, altered or plagiarized by any of the exponents of gurbani kirtan in the last few centuries out of respect for the authors of these compositions. Bhai Avtar Singh asked Professor Kartar Singh to look at the two volumes he had co-authored with his elder brother Bhai Gurcharan Singh and see which raag forms were similar to those decided by the RNC of Baba Sucha Singh. Bhai Avtar Singh offered to sing only those raags. Ironically, at the same event in Nanded, the famed duo Singh Bandhus sang the Mughal court forms of raag kanra and malhar!” (2011, 276-7)

not on the memories of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara, but instead on a consensus that in turn rejected the raag forms still extant in the shabd-reets.<sup>226</sup> Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian expresses the importance of basing new derivations on the fundamentals found within the shabd-reets, rather than rejecting them altogether:

*Our Gurmat Sangeet people, they undo the old compositions. There is no need for innovation, but if there is to be innovation it has to be based on those fundamentals [found in the shabd-reets]. And if you have the experience and the vision, by all means get the variants and build on it, but you can't do without it [shabd-reets].* (Recorded interview, Feb 23, 2012.)

Today the Gurbani Kirtan raag forms that have been created, standardized, propagated, and taught by the educational institutions and now sung by contemporary ragis, are less informed by extant memory or historical practice and instead are based largely on popular opinion informed by modern written sources including those codified by 19<sup>th</sup> century Hindustani musical reformist Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande,<sup>227</sup> the same forms which have come to dominate and define Hindustani raag scales.<sup>228</sup>

Dr. Francesca Cassio verifies the fact that “part of the contemporary Sikh pedagogy also refers to Bhatkhande, although the Sikh Gurus’ tradition has an older, peculiar system of *talim* (musical training), and their repertoire includes raags unclassified in [Bhatkhande’s] *Kramik Pustak Malika*.” (2011, 315)

---

<sup>226</sup> The imposition of the majority opinion onto the minority memory-bearers illustrates the hegemonic force normative discourse and ideology exerts to regulate communal culture.

<sup>227</sup> See Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011, 268-277) for a complete discussion of this topic.

<sup>228</sup> Dilip Chandra Vedi, in his last interview “There is too much noise” by Rajiv Vora comments on the issues contained with Bhatkhande’s work as an academic without practical musical knowledge.

Rajiv Vora: “*What do you think of Pandit Bhatkande* (one of Dilipchandra Vedi’s compatriots and supposed to possess vast knowledge, but bookish)”

Dilip Chandra Vedi: “... After all, Bhatkhandeji had no practical knowledge of music and music is a practical art. What is the point in claiming to be knowledgeable about music if you cannot sing even a note properly. Andhere me rath chalanese kya matlab? (What’s the use of driving a. chariot in the dark?) He was a pandit in theory. But to be a true Pandit in the field of music. one must also. know the practice.” (<http://wimvandermeer.wordpress.com/2012/11/23/dilip-chandra-vedi/>)





Figure 22: Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal singing Gurbani Kirtan at the first Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan 1991, Jawaddi Taksal, Ludhiana. Photo courtesy of Jawaddi Taksal.

Still, Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal who served on the RNC, strongly disagreed with the notion that there can exist raags particular to the Sikhs whether they are historically extant or newly created and instead insists that they should be standardized according to the written Hindustani treatises:

Dr. Paintal: *Even now some of the [Sikh] raags are not standardized, what our Sanskrit granthas say is absolutely opposite [from the Sikh raags].*

NK: *Because the raags are specific to the Sikh community?*

Dr. Paintal: *You cannot have a different form of a raag, if one raag is in Hindustani [sangeet], that raag cannot be different in Sikh music, Bhairvi is same, Kedar is same, Ramkali is same, you cannot change it. (Recorded interview, Ashram Marg, New Delhi, February 2, 2011.)*<sup>229</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal recently passed away on Jan 27, 2012 at the age of 76 just one week before I returned to New Delhi to continue my Ph.D research, in which his perspective plays a significant role. I thank him for the knowledge and insight he shared with an emphatic authority backed by his life-long career as musician, musicologist, and professor including but not limited to: his musical education in

The question of authenticating raag forms within the Sikh system continues to be a topic of discussion and debate within the revival, with divergent perspectives based on how each one's pedagogic background informs their discursive ideology.

#### 4.3.3 Discordant Pedagogies and Ideologies: The Modernist Search for Authenticity

Dr. Paintal as well as two other Sikh musicians who served on the RNC, Pandit Tejpal and Surinder Singh Bandhu, are students of renowned Hindustani classical musician and khayal exponent, Ustad Amir Khan (Lucknow gharana). They all hold similar beliefs that Sikh raags should be based on those forms used in classical Hindustani Sangeet. Their shared perspective illustrates that they were not taught by those rababi or kirtaniya-ragis who remembered how the raags were rendered by the parampara, but instead were trained in Hindustani classical music. This fact was corroborated by Pandit Tejpal Singh Bandhu:

Pt. Tejpal S. Bandhu: *I started in classical music, frankly speaking, but because I belonged to Sikh, I used that knowledge in shabd singing, I did not have any formal training from any shabd singer, because my classical training had attained that stage, then we started singing shabds, we were accepted very well, because our music was different.*

NK: *When you met at the Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan to define the raags, did your classical music training help you to decide how the raags should be sung?*

Pt. Tejpal S. Bandhu: *{nods his head side to side} yes, ha(n), ha(n)*

NK: *Do shabd-reets have different raag forms than Hindustani Classical music?*

Tejpal S. Bandhu: *Music is music, that is what I think. If you are vocalist you can understand reet also, and shastriya sangeet also. You have trained your*

---

Hindustani Classical music from Ustad Amir Khan (Lucknow Gharana), his 1972 Ph.D thesis *Nature and place of music in Sikh religion and its affinity with Hindustani classical music* through Delhi University (based on ethnographic research he conducted 1963-1970 with renowned Gurbani Kirtan ragi-Rababi musicians), his promoting the authenticity of the heritage shabd-reet compositions published in the musicological two-volume treatises *Gurbani Sangeet: Pracheen Reet Ratnavali* (1978/79) by Bhai Avtar and Bhai Gurcharan Singh Ji by Punjabi Univeristy, his integral role in the 1991-93 Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan and Raag Nirnayak Committee to standardize the raag forms used in Gurbani Kirtan, as well as his academic role as a student and professor of Indian music and history at Delhi University.



*voice. Sometimes raag treatment is different by the ragis, that is why we stick to our tradition, the main music in our country. I use that, I don't follow these ragis. [First] classical music, then Gurbani, you fit it in there [into the classical]. I understand that when singing Gurbani with classical music, then Gurbani gets the top position, because my duty is to convey the bani. (Recorded interview, New Delhi, June 3, 2011.)*

Although the above conversation with Pandit Tejpal Singh Bandhu illustrates that his participation on the RNC was informed primarily by his Hindustani classical music training, overtime he has recognized that there is a particular knowledge-system related to the singing of shabd-reet compositions, which he himself had not learned.<sup>230</sup>

Dr. Paintal on the other hand maintains the perspective that the memory of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara needs to be corrected to match with Hindustani classical music “*I am going to finalize the raags now according to the Indian treatises, the granthas of Sanskrit, some of the raags are still being wrongly sung in the Sikh community, I will set them right now.*” (Recorded interview, February 2, 2011.) Even though Dr. Paintal participated on the RNC and worked to establish the normative “Sikh” raag system, he nevertheless feels that there have been artificial impositions to create the *raag saroops* unique to “Gurmat Sangeet”.

---

<sup>230</sup> Illustrating the constant process of negotiation in institutionalizing a musical genre, Bhai Baldeep Singh relays a story about how the brothers Bandhu actually sang compositions at the 1997 Gurmat Sangeet Samelan in Hindustani raags *darbari kanara* and *malhar* rather than the prescribed Gurmat Sangeet raags they themselves had helped to create. Similarly, though initially Pandit Tejpal Singh Bandhu believed the old kirtaniya-ragis were illiterate and did not know the correct raag forms, after having conversations with Bhai Baldeep Singh, he realized that there were traditional ragis who were knowledgeable and skilled kirtaniya musicians. (Relayed to author by Bhai Baldeep Singh and found in his article 2011, 253, 277.) The fact that Pt. Singh Bandhu chose to recognize his own situatedness within the Gurbani Kirtan genre both when conversing with myself as well as Bhai Baldeep Singh illustrates that a scholarly level of discourse can be had when knowledge is shared. Preconceived beliefs can be redefined when engaging in the process of research and dialogue. In 2012 at the age of 75, Pt. Tejpal Singh wrote a statement about Bhai Baldeep Singh, “Coming from a family like his, BBS is an insider of the tradition. I have heard him sing compositions (ritiyan) that date back to the Gurus’ times. His memory is so rich...it is fascinating to see what all he remembers. He is a true bearer of the oral tradition. He is an authority on Gurmat Sangeet.” (Translated.)

A primary example of raag forms that are contested both by Paintal as well as parampara informed musicians are the *Dakhni* raags which proponents of Gurmat Sangeet take as a literal instruction to be sung in the South (*dakhni*) Indian Carnatic style. Dr. Gurnam states:

Guru Nanak Sahib used Raagas belonging to local tradition to propagate his message, of which the *Deccani* Raaga (Gaorhee Dakhnee, Wadhans Dakhnee, Bilwal Dakhnee, Raamklee Dakhnee, Maaroo Dakhnee, Parbhatee Dakhnee) tradition deserves a special mention. Dakhani in word in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib indicates about the southern Music system.<sup>231</sup> (emphasis added)

Similarly, Professor Surinder Singh's Raja Academy prospectus incorporates "Dhakhani" as one of the musical styles or genres encompassed within Gurmat Sangeet: "you will be able to sing different styles encompassed in Gurmat Sangeet such as Folk, Dhakhani (South Indian style), dhrupad, Khayal, etc."<sup>232</sup> However, defining "dhakhani" to mean that it should be sung in the South Indian Carnatic style is believed to be too literal a translation without any reference in Sikh operative practice to support such a claim as stated by Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011, 277), also told to me by Bhai Kultar Singh in a personal communication (Espanola, NM, July 26, 2011) and expressed by Dr. Paintal below:

*In Ludhiana, [at] Jawaddi [Taksal], Sucha Singh, he instigated us, "you make these raags also, find out what is Ramkali Dakhni." The problem with saying 'ramkali dakhni' means that it should be blended with South Indian raags. They just say 'dakhni' means south – this is not my interpretation...and at Jawaddi Sucha Singh instigated all the musicians, because they were coming to perform there, and they made the committee including myself... Sucha Singh, when he wanted to start the conference, he asked some people in Punjab, those senior ragis said go and meet Dr. Paintal and he will assign all the final raags, this was the 91, 92, 93 Jawaddi conference... So I had made the notation and elaboration of the raags and this was assigned to the ragis, and they practiced and came and performed. (Recorded interview, February 2, 2011.)*

---

<sup>231</sup> "Sikh Musicology" by Dr. Gurnam Singh (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>)

<sup>232</sup> Found in the Raj Academy prospectus under the Pedagogy: Vocal Learning section.

Such a statement by Dr. Paintal clearly demonstrates how the RNC was not created to *revive* the extant Sikh raag forms and musical styles, but was part of a reformist agenda to standardize “Sikh” raag forms, in effect also creating new ones. These newly standardized raags were then propagated as the “proper” forms to be sung by ragis and other Gurbani Kirtan musicians, and imposed on the traditional memory-bearers. In this way, the process of reforming Gurbani Kirtan to institutionalize an independent Sikh musical identity has had the negative consequence of erasing those remaining traditional modes of operative practice.

Dr. Paintal’s contribution to the RNC was unique as a trained Indian classical musician, Music Professor at Delhi University, and as the first Sikh to carry out ethnographic scholarship on Gurbani Kirtan, interviewing renowned turn-of-the-century musicians documented in his 1972 Ph.D. thesis *Nature and place of music in Sikh religion and its affinity with Hindustani classical music* through Delhi University.<sup>233</sup>

*The work I was doing in my research, I help them [RNC] with the raags that were not popular, suhi, majh, bairari, dev gandhari, mali gaura, these were the raags that were not popular among the Sikhs. So when I went and did my [dissertation] research, I collected from five, six, seven ragis from 1960 period who worked in Darbar Sahib, and had retired 30 years ago. So when I met them they were all about 80 years old, I told you last time also, they had stayed in their villages, they had stopped singing, and I asked them to sing. When they realized that I am a serious student, and I know some raags, because they ask me how much I know about music, the raags of Guru Granth Sahib, I recited them immediately, without any instrument, because I am a classical musician, I can sing, I learned classical music from great Indian Ustads. So my background is different on that basis also. (Recorded interview, February 2, 2011.)*

It is noteworthy that Dr. Paintal interviewed many traditional ragis whose memories and operative practices initially informed his research and work. In his dissertation he attributes authority to the heritage shabd-reet compositions by ascribing them with the authenticity and

---

<sup>233</sup> Paintal further states: “I went and did my research, I collected from five, six, seven ragis from 1960 period who worked in Darbar Sahib, and had retired thirty years ago, so when I met them they were all about 80 years old. I told you last time also, they had stayed in their villages, they had stopped singing, and I asked them to sing.” (Recorded interview, February 2, 2011.)

authority of the Gurus and their court musicians, preserved by the memory of the rababis and kirtaniya-ragis. (1972, 47) However as seen in the aforementioned Aduti Gurmat Sangeet conferences (1991-93), and then in interviews conducted in 2010 & 2011, his perspective appears to be informed by his role as a student and teacher of Hindustani Sangeet and History. No longer did he view the memory-bearers as authoritative and their shabd-reetes as authentic, but instead claimed that: 1) the Gurus were not musicians and therefore could not have first sung their banis in raag, but instead that 2) the Gurus composed the poetry and then Guru Arjan added the raag forms to the Gurbani when compiling the Adi Granth, and finally that 3) some of those raag forms sung by rababi and ragi musicians of the Gurus' court were actually incorrect.

*Gurus were not musicians, so they have not given the forms of the raags [in the Guru Granth Sahib] they just mention the names of the raags... Neither the musicians, [nor] the ragis were competent, they just inherited singing and learnt Gurbani, and whatever you used to hear, from the seniors, they would copy it, knowingly or unknowingly, they sang them.* (Paintal, Dr. Ajit S. recorded interview, February 2, 2011.)

It is common in contemporary discourse to hear Sikh musicians referred to as illiterate<sup>234</sup> which seems to reflect both the modern professionalization of ragis as well as the modernist trope that also positions those specialized kirtaniya-ragis and rababis as low-caste and illiterate *mirasis* (musician caste) due not to their lack of knowledge, but because their education came from an oral paradigm not recognized as authoritative within modern institutions.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh in his article "What is Kirtan" responds to Dr. Paintal's claim that the Kirtaniya-Ragis and Rababis were illiterate musicians by retelling a discussion they had on this subject. Bhai Baldeep Singh illustrates that Paintal's perspective can be attributed to the fact that he was a product of the Hindustani classical music pedagogic system and had not learnt from the Gurbani Kirtan parampara and therefore could not recognize the particular *basant-hindol* raag *tika* exposition in question. (2011, 253)

<sup>235</sup> Professor Alankar Singh also expresses a similar sentiment that the traditional ragis were illiterate (from an oral paradigm) as opposed to the scientific (modern) approach taken by his teacher Professor Tara Singh: "Prof. Tara Singh realized we should fill the gaps. Many of the raags were not known. He realized that there are 31 raags, but there are others also, like Gauri has many forms. What was the actual structure, what was the actual notes? So he learned music and consulted many books and started his work in this direction only. He wanted to establish this tradition, to imbibe this tradition. So I think he is the pioneer. He had a scientific approach, how to analyze the facts, how to discern it. Initially the musicians

Nevertheless, as personal perspectives do change, it is interesting that Dr. Paintal's naming himself as a "historian" who looks at the facts, has caused his initial belief in the authenticity of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara to change drastically from his 1972 dissertation to our 2010 & 2011 conversations. As a *historian*, Dr. Paintal came to privilege the text as the only authentic source of verifiable knowledge and therefore takes the lack of notation in the Guru Granth Sahib and the lack of stories in the *Janamsakhis* that tell of the Gurus' musical training, as proof that the Gurus were not trained musicians and therefore could not have musically composed their own banis. "*Guru Arjan found [that] lots of [the] bani of predecessor Gurus were being lost, with the help of his mama [maternal uncle], Bhai Gurdas, he collected [the] predecessors' bani and assigned the raags...this was the practice of those days.*" (Recorded interview, February 2, 2011.) Bhai Baldeep Singh also recalls Dr. Paintal stating in 2002 that "the system in old times was such that the *gurus would write gurbani* and then *the rababis would compose them and allocate raags.*"<sup>236</sup> (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 287. My emphasis added.) Dr. Paintal's conviction as a scholar of both Shastriya Sangeet and History not only undercuts the Gurbani Kirtan parampara's orally transmitted knowledge, which remembers some shabd-reetes composed and sung by the Gurus themselves, but also disrupts the widely held revivalist belief that raag is an integral component to the affective nature of the bani. Taken a step further, Dr. Paintal's belief subverts the *nidharat raag* prescription as propagated by the proponents of "Gurmat Sangeet", who crucially link the raag headings of the Guru Granth Sahib to an orthopraxic prescription by each author of Gurbani.

---

in India were not very educated, but Tara Singh was educated. So education helped him in this. The old ragis were not very educated. They just sang, preached and taught music. They couldn't read and write. The notation system was not very much popular in those days." (Recorded interview, April 21, 2011.) Such statements seem to be representative of the common (mis)perception of traditional ragis as ways to deny their orally transmitted knowledge in favor of modern written forms.

<sup>236</sup> Cited from a paper Dr. Paintal gave at Punjab University, Chandigarh in October 2002.

## **Conclusion: Mediating Oral and Textual Authority**

The revival was initiated as a response to the significant loss incurred by the Sikh “intangible” heritage as an effort to preserve and revive its historic musicality. However, through the preservation process it has become ensnared in reformist apparatuses that have attempted to create a corporate Sikh musical identity or Gurmat Sangeet, propagated as an independent genre through a standard institutionalized pedagogy. Problematically, the process of standardization has created a Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy based on a literal interpretation of the “musicology” contained in the Guru Granth Sahib, erasing the diversity of historically operative practices.

To understand the movement or erasure that occurs when translating between oral practice and the written text it is important to recognize the “obvious distance that exists between score and performance, and between score and composer” where “the act of performance reflects the complexity of the sign-the infinitely reflecting hall of mirrors that is constituted by sign process.” (Mauk 143) Following Derridian logic, Mauk promotes an “insurrectionist approach of deconstruction” when navigating the space between the performance and the text:

The nature of performance is such that the performer is for the most part an insurrectionist, that is to say, the performer is one who constructs his own “work” from the notations that the composer has left. Moreover, on the practical plane, the fact of the matter is that performers, in making decisions about musical elements that are not notational, respond on the whole not so much to a composer’s score as they respond to performance traditions, traditions that until this century were essentially invisible over time. (143)

Using the notion of notation as an analogy for the musicology of the Guru Granth Sahib, it is important to note that “notation does not so much preserve works as it more generally symbolizes or represents performance practice.” (Mauk 140) In this way that which is written can be viewed as a roadmap, that when assessed with extant operative performance practices, allows for informed interpretations and future renderings. However, the contemporary proponents of Gurmat Sangeet adhere primarily to the notion that the text of the Guru Granth

Sahib necessarily dictates a musicological prescription for exact replication, whereas the parampara views the Guru Granth Sahib, memory-bearers and past operative practices as authoritative.

The next chapter will investigate the tension between orally transmitted operative practices and textualist interpretations underlying the debates between parampara and Gurmat Sangeet proponents respectively. Included in the debates is the reformist belief that the traditional performer is limited by traditional compositions and their own performance tradition that attempts to create caricatures of the past, while at the same time stating that traditional musicians are currently changing the “music in the guru’s way” (Gurmat Sangeet) by not conforming to their interpretations of the Guru Granth Sahib. The traditional parampara musicians respond by arguing that their performances are not informed by contemporary interpretations, but instead by multiple extant sources including: the Guru Granth Sahib, notations, memory-bearers, performance traditions and knowledge historical contexts, all which allow for vitality within ones’ own performance. These foundational differences affect notions of authority, authenticity, and orthopraxy within the Sikh psyche, and thus continue to be topics of debate within the renaissance of Gurbani Kirtan.

## Chapter 5

### Debating Orthopraxy, Authority, Authenticity

#### Introduction

The revival-cum-reform has created “hermeneutic chaos”<sup>237</sup> in the Gurbani Kirtan revival where the new is being equated with the old, and the old is being denied its place within the genre. In turn, the discrepancy between reviving traditional modes of practice and reforming contemporary ones has created much debate within the field. Most of the discussions between scholars and musicians within the renaissance relate to whether or not what is being revived can be deemed authentic (raag, instrumentation, repertoire) as recognized by Sikh studies scholar Bob van der Linden who questions the authenticity of “historically informed performers.”

Sikh scholars and musicians in search of authentic kirtan can only imagine what the music of earlier generations was like; one never knows that one is hearing the original of any kind of music because it will always be related to something that precedes it...historically informed performers are not therefore really historical, but remake the past in the image of the present.  
(van der Linden 2011, 389)

In an effort to clarify notions of authenticity, it therefore becomes important to differentiate the compositions that are modern products, from those that contain historical knowledge of a pre-modern Sikh musical identity. Van der Linden points out that there is a lack of hard evidence to support revivalist claims to authenticity because musical knowledge has historically been safely and at times jealously guarded, reflecting the elitist nature of orally transmitted knowledge. Because of this, most contemporary scholars and musicians as products of the modern episteme, maintain positivistic perspectives promoting the hard evidence found in the accessible written word while disparaging those male-dominated hereditary structures (*gharanas*), which have historically limited knowledge dissemination. Although notation and media technology have made general musical knowledge democratically accessible, specific operative aspects can only be learned by those students who have direct access to the teacher voicing the knowledge.

---

<sup>237</sup> (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011)



Today knowledge is available on the open market, through online videos, discussion forums, written notations, and has been made more accessible with online courses and their regional support staff. However, with greater accessibility comes less specialized attention and interaction, causing greater room for error and misinformation, thus continuing the debate regarding orthopraxy, authority and authenticity.

Within the revival there continue to be many conversations, discussions, and debates, particularly between Dr. Gurnam Singh, Prof. Surinder Singh, and Bhai Baldeep Singh. They teach students in India and abroad: in person, through their institutions, through online and distance learning courses, short workshops, and intensive courses.

Specifically, Prof. Surinder Singh through Raj Academy (est.1994) has created “Gurmat Sangeet Outreach” (GSO) and “Naad Yoga” online courses<sup>238</sup> as well as BA, MA, and Ph.D. courses offered through Thames Valley University.<sup>239</sup> Additionally Prof. Surinder Singh holds workshops around the world to make Gurmat Sangeet accessible, particularly to a diasporic Sikh and international new-age audience. Similarly, the Gurmat Sangeet Department at Punjabi University, Patiala through Dr. Gurnam Singh, recently initiated “Gurmat Gyan Online Teaching” (est. 2013) with Elementary, Foundation, Certificate, Undergraduate, and Post Graduate accredited courses in Gurmat Sangeet geared towards a Punjabi and diasporic Sikh audience.<sup>240</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> [www.rajacademy.com](http://www.rajacademy.com), [kirtaneducation.com](http://kirtaneducation.com)

<sup>239</sup> 20 Dec, 2006: “LONDON: The Thames Valley University has awarded Prof. Surinder Singh Matharu with the honorary title of “Professor” in the Subject of Sikh Music & Sikh Musicology.... Last year the Thames Valley University joined forces with Raj Academy and launched a Degree in Sikh Music. The University is currently running the 2nd year of the BMus (BA Honors in Sikh Music); following on in 2008 courses for MA and MPhil in Sikh Music will be launched; followed by a PhD program. In the very same year of 2008, seventeen students, the first ever outside of India, will graduate with a B.Mus in Sikh Music, allowing them to either study further or pursue a career with their specialist qualification.” ([www.worldsikhnews.com](http://www.worldsikhnews.com), accessed March 19, 2012)

<sup>240</sup> [www.gurmatgyanonlinepup.com](http://www.gurmatgyanonlinepup.com)



Figure 23: (clockwise) Raj Academy Website pages, featuring the Gurmat Sangeet Outreach program (rajacademy.com); Prof. Surinder Singh showing a video example of a jori lesson recorded for the GSO program at his home in Birmingham, UK. Photo by author.



Figure 24: Bhai Baldeep Singh teaching students at the Anad Conservatory, Qila Sarai, Sultanpur Lodhi, Punjab. Photos by author. Website: [www.anadfoundation.org/anad-conservatory](http://www.anadfoundation.org/anad-conservatory)

Bhai Baldeep Singh has established Anad Conservatory, a guru-shishya based program in Sultanpur Lodhi, Punjab,<sup>241</sup> as an alternative educative process. Additionally, he bi-annually teaches two-week intensive fourteen hour per day courses as well as shorter workshops around the world, with scheduled monthly Skype classes (as well as individual Skype sessions).

While all three revivalists are working to carve out a space for traditional Gurbani Kirtan practices within the modern psyche and devotional sphere through the propagation of traditional

<sup>241</sup> <http://anadconservatory.org/index.html>

instruments and singing in raags, they all have different ways of approaching the topic and reviving the practices. The differences have caused much debate within the field as witnessed in the Appendix detailing the Facebook discussion that arose in August 2010 between Prof. Surinder Singh and Bhai Baldeep Singh.<sup>242</sup> These debates include questions relating to textualist readings of the Guru Granth Sahib, to the authority of memory-bearers, to the authenticity of newly standardized raag structures compared to their heterogeneous past renditions, and to the orthopraxy of singing Gurbani only in raags “prescribed” by the Guru Granth Sahib compared to extant practices that sing Gurbani in a variety of raags. Particularly Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy proscribes both Gurbani Kirtan sung in non-prescribed raags and those *puratan* (ancient) shabdreets that they perceive as having “added” emotive exclamations to the Bani. The orthopraxic prescriptions determined by each interlocutor relate to which sources are deemed authoritative, whether the Guru Granth Sahib, the Gurbani Sangeet Parampara, one’s personal experience, or a combination, all affecting notions of authenticity within the genre.

Since the different approaches to the revival have caused much debate due to differing notions of authority, authenticity, and orthopraxy, the negative discourse has a tendency to overshadow the commonality within the revivalist goals. This chapter will give voice to these important issues through interviews with the protagonists, while at the same time allowing for an opening towards acknowledgement and dialogue regarding past, present, and future Gurbani Kirtan practices and revivalist efforts.

---

<sup>242</sup> See Appendix for Facebook Debate.

## 5.1 Contesting Ideologies: Questioning the Parampara's Authority to "Change" Gurmat Sangeet

### 5.1.1 *Nidharat* Raag Prescription

The modern creation of the Gurmat Sangeet genre based on its own unique musicology has as one of its main tenets the promotion of *nidharat* raags ("prescribed" in the Guru Granth Sahib by each bani's raag heading) as clearly expressed by Dr. Gurnam Singh:

*In the contemporary world of Sikh music Gur Shabad Kirtan tradition as founded by the Gurus and developed by the Sikh Panth has established itself as an independent and original identity. This tradition of Gurmat Sangeet prescribed in the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib can be termed as Sikh Musicology. In order to understand Gurmat Sangeet tradition as directed and determined by the Gurus, that Kirtan be performed in a particular Raaga, according to the established tradition.*<sup>243</sup> (emphasis added)

In other words, Dr. Gurnam states that in order for Gurmat Sangeet to be established as an "independent and original identity," it has to gain its authority from being linked to a "tradition as directed and determined by the Gurus" and therefore must "be performed in a particular Raaga, according to the established tradition" as found in the Guru Granth Sahib. Thus the Guru Granth Sahib in its written form is viewed as the ultimate authority for establishing "Gurmat" based on a Sikh musicology, which is interpreted as indicating that the bani should *only* be sung in the raag as prescribed by its raag heading. This perspective is also expressed by Prof. Surinder Singh:

*The downfall of kirtan, only one word, and that is the Word, when we separate ourselves from Guru. If we don't follow Guru then we don't have a kirtan, end of story. It will sound very odd. Because 90% of people will get very upset with this, what we are doing, Surinder, you are saying we have been doing wrong? You know how do I put it Nirinjan? **If according to Siri Guru Granth Sahib, if that does not fit into that frame, then how can I say that is right?** Who am I to say that is right? I am not here to judge anybody, I am not judging them, they are doing wrong or right, they are doing what they think. But **according to the***

---

<sup>243</sup> "Sangeet Prabandh Of Gurbani" by Dr. Gurnam Singh  
(<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>)

***parameters of Siri Guru Granth Sahib, that is Gurmat Sangeet. If they are singing but they are not singing what is written, it cannot be Gurmat Sangeet according to the Nanakian school, to the school of Guru Nanak.*** (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Birmingham, UK, Feb 28, 2012.)

The modern interpretation of “Gurmat Sangeet” is defined as following the musical parameters laid out in the Guru Granth Sahib, however the notion that one has to sing *solely* what is written negates and even proscribes the extant lived operative practices that were a part of traditional “Gurmat” practice.

Traditional kirtaniya-ragi, rababi, and Namdhari musicians however sing Gurbani in various raags and not only those raags found within its pages. At the same time they also sing Gurbani in the raag indicated in the Guru Granth Sahib, thus acknowledging the importance of the raag headings while also recognizing that there has been a parallel tradition of operative practice, parts of which may even predate the compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>244</sup> Due to

---

<sup>244</sup> Noteworthy, the late Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal made the highly controversial claim that contested the widely held belief that the raag headings of the Guru Granth Sahib indicate the raag in which they were revealed and instead argued that Guru Arjan Dev Ji added these raag headings when compiling the Adi Granth (which became Guru Granth Sahib). Such a claim would further unravel the nidharat raag prescription.

Dr. Paintal: *All saint poets, they composed. Like our bani was assigned to raag by Guru Arjan Dev, there is so much controversy when I tell this to Sikhs... A small example is Sheik Farid- none of his poetry is in raags. Why does his poetry come in raags in Siri Guru Granth Sahib? And he was before Jai Dev, a little bit earlier to 12<sup>th</sup> century, there was no existence of Sikh religion, and when Guru Nanak Dev collected Sheik Farid's bani, he gave his raag names there. Guru Arjan found lots of bani of predecessor Gurus were being lost, with the help of his mama [maternal uncle], Bhai Guru Das, he collected predecessors bani and assigned the raags.*

NK: *Why assign the raags then?*

Dr. Paintal: *This was the practice of those days. All the medieval poets wrote their verses meant to be sung, their disciples used to sing, even Jai Dev also.*

NK: *Ok so the authors did not write their poems in raag, but they were meant to be sung?*

Dr. Paintal: *Yes – but no one knows who assigned the raags because the raags are prevalent from the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. But after Jai Dev there was North Indian music, after 12<sup>th</sup> c., our music got little changed because of the Muslim influence. Because of the Khirji Dynasty our music started changing and our raags became different raags than South Indian raags.* (Recorded interview Feb 2, 2011)



the differences of opinion surrounding this topic, I asked Hazoori Ragi and hereditary musician Bhai Balbir Singh if Gurbani has to be sung in the title raag of Guru Granth Sahib. He responds:

*You should sing in that raag, but if you don't know or can't remember that raag, you can sing in another raag, that is fine. {he directs me - "leykhn" (write this!)} paap niye (nahi hai) (It is not a sin). If you don't know raag, then you can sing without raag.*

NK: *Is it better to sing in raag? Does it have more of an effect?*

Bhai Balbir Singh: *You feel it dil-dimaag (in heart and mind) it has a more profound effect. (Singh, Bhai Balbir, recorded interview, translated from Punjabi, Feb 8, 2012)*

I also posed this question to the Zakhmis, a family of hereditary musicians, who responded similarly:

NK: *Do we need to sing shabds in the raag according to Guru Granth Sahib?*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *We should do that, but there are so many old bandish (tunes), they are not in the same raag as Sri Guru Granth Sahib. There is a very famous bandish, one in [raag] Bhairvi, [raag] Jaunpuri sometimes, One is in [raag] Asa. There is no [raag] Bhairvi in Sri Guru Granth Sahib but bandish comes in Bhairvi. A very old bandish. {I ask him to sing this bandish and his father Bhai Amrik Singh joins in singing "Aad Gure namhe, Jugad Gure namhe"} [Raag] Bhairvi in Chartaal (twelve-beat rhythm). This is the slok of Sukhmani Sahib, which is in Gauri raag [in SGGS], but this bandish is in Bhairvi.*

NK: *Do we have memory of the author of this bandish?*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *My grandfather also sang this. This bandish came from my grandfather then to my father, then to me. (Recorded interview, Feb 20, 2012)*

The Namdhari musicians similarly acknowledge that Gurbani Kirtan has a tradition of being sung not only in title raag, but also in various raags and is not limited to only those contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Namdhari sangat has managed to sustain traditional forms of Gurbani Kirtan within their community since the early 20th century through the patronage of their past two Satgurus, M. Partap Singh and M. Jagjit Singh.<sup>245</sup> Because of their

---

<sup>245</sup> The Namdharis are a sect of Sikhs who continued the lineage of human Gurus after the death of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, rather than investing the authority of the Guruship in the Guru Granth

dedication to singing classical Gurbani Kirtan, I asked Ustad Balwant Singh (the primary teacher and ragi at Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana) about the Namdhari position on the contemporary *nidharat raag* prescriptions.

NK: *What do you feel about the idea that we need to only sing in the title raag?*

Ustad Balwant Singh: *We don't follow these things. We sing in all raags. We have old compositions, we have many compositions in raags that are not written in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and we used to sing all these. So we don't follow these instructions that you should sing in that raag. No- all raags are made to sing.*

NK: *So no limitations?*<sup>246</sup>

Ustad Balwant Singh: *No, we sing in all raags. Satguruji [Jagjit Singh] himself sings in all raags. He made himself his own compositions, he is a brilliant composer also, he made so many compositions of Gurbani Shabds and these are in the various raags and different raags. So there is no type of this prohibition that you should only sing in the raags of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, no we sing all raags. (Recorded interview, Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana, April 25, 2011.)*

Ustad Balwant Singh is clear to explain that as tradition bearers, they have old compositions sung in various non-nidharat raags, and believe that Gurbani can even be sung in raags not contained within the Guru Granth Sahib. Their openness to creative interpretation is informed by their pedagogy and extant operative practices that maintain an openness to future operative practices.

---

Sahib as the living Guru. They have preserved extant musicalities from the 19<sup>th</sup> century by focusing on the lived operative practices of embodying the Gurbani within the self rather than externalizing its authority onto the physicality of the Word found in the Book.

<sup>246</sup> Regarding proscriptive limitations, I also ask Ustad Balwant Singh whether Namdhari women study and play Gurbani Kirtan:

NK: *"How about the girls, do they also learn kirtan?"*

Ustad Balwant Singh: *"Yes, boys and girls are evenly taught here. There is no limitation that we are not going to teach girls. One day I take [teach] classes of girls and one day I take classes of boys. Satguruji started this thing. Before it was not the thing in our panth also, so in 1990s Satguruji started this thing to give teaching to the girls. Even my wife, she learnt from Satguruji himself, and she sings."*

NK: *"The women also sit together and do kirtan in the presence of Satguruji?"*

Ustad Balwant Singh: *"Yes, the women do kirtan in the presence of Satguruji. They were given a day in the week to perform. Saturday it was their turn. Now many are married, - now upcoming girls are getting teaching and hopefully in one or two years they will be able to perform kirtan."* (Recorded interview, Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana, April 25, 2011.)



Due to the differences in opinion held between Namdhari tradition bearers and Gurmat Sangeet advocates, I also asked Prof. Surinder Singh how he negotiates the Raj Academy position on *nidharat raags* when the Namdhari teachers that he employs do not subscribe to such prescriptions:

***Raj Academy has one main goal which we do not compromise, and that is nidharat raag. The musicology, terminology of the raag. That is one thing and the composition, that is separate. And then there is another side, the execution, the performance bench where we bring the dilruba, the taus and saranda, that is where they [the Namdhari teachers] are involved... You know for me [it is] the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. For them the bani - the Gurus wrote it, but it is not their Guru. And that is a big thing. Don't take me wrong, they never go out of title raag when they are with me, but their faith is not as much [in the Guru Granth Sahib] so that is why we don't have them with students, we don't take that risk, we don't put them at the forefront to talk about it that way. We only take a technical support from them when it comes to instruments. (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)***

From this statement it is clear that while acknowledged for their musical proficiency, the Namdhari teachers are relegated only to teaching instrumental techniques, so as to not disrupt Raj Academy's primary goal – to promote *nidharat raags* as the core of Gurmat Sangeet ideology.

Gurmat Sangeet as defined in the modern era is being institutionalized and thus promoted as the standard for “traditional” orthopraxy. In this paradigm the old parampara modes of practice have been viewed as *changing* the newly defined “Guru’s mat” when heritage shabd-reetes are sung in various raags and not only in the nidharath raags:

***Raj Academy took [a] stand, but we have [been] labeled as Talibans, I don't know why, that we are so fanatic that we don't want to hear any other form? We want to say [raag] Asa is Asa. I mean, I don't have the power to change, Nirinjan, anything that is written in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, you can't change ... Guru Arjan's bani, if there is bani from the creator himself, we call it “dhur ki bani”<sup>247</sup> even if it is from the Guru himself, then even Guru does not have the***

---

<sup>247</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh raises the notion that Gurbani is revealed “dhur ki bani.” This questions whether the status of the revealed “dhur ki bani” is only encompassed in the Gurbani text enshrined in the Guru

***proper authority to change it.*** *The Guru is a teacher, a spiritual guide and Guru has wrote that bani for us and compiled it together. For me I say keep it simple, whatever Guru says, let us do it.* (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)

The nidharat raag prescriptions stress the importance of singing in the raag heading by linking the ability of the raag notes to add emotive expression and further reveal the meaning of the bani.

*Musicology is the emotional angle of it. When you put A and B together, equal to what? When you put ghre [home dwelling note], vadi [main note in a raag], anuvadi [attendant notes in a raag], nyaas [resting on a note] these terms are put [with] a particular taal, a tempo of a composition. The word is “sit, down” or I say “SIT DOWN!” All I have changed is the pitch and the tempo but everything is now different. Same word but different meaning. And that meaning is a musicology, that is what raag is. If Sat Guru is indicating a partaal or a ghar pehla, ghar dooga, ghar tija,<sup>248</sup> he is being very particular, that this is the main chorus, this is first reference, and second and third and in total is four or six or eight. And on top [in the heading] he is saying is one line or two lines together [do pade]. He is very particular, and I don’t want to change it, I don’t want to be such an “Ustad” that I want to cut what Guru Arjan Says. For me, what my Guru says is full and final. This is what we have been trying to promote.* (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)

If we accept the notion that the raag conveys the extra-textual meaning of the bani, can we also therefore acknowledge the extant musical compositions as also offering further insight into the ways the bani has been revealed? In other words, can the myriad of expressions represent different aspects of the extant tradition, whether remembered, written, or sung?

When looking at the history of the lived operative practices of Gurbani Kirtan that have predated and paralleled the Guru Granth Sahib, it becomes important to ask what qualifies as change, how we define change, and particularly what is appropriate change? Taking this into consideration, the retroactive imposition of newly established modes onto past historical practice

---

Granth Sahib, whether when sung in title raag, or whether it can also be recognized in the few remaining shabd-reet compositions which are remembered as being revealed by the Gurus themselves.

<sup>248</sup> “Ghar” can be found in the Guru Granth Sahib although its meaning has been forgotten. People speculate that it could refer to differing *taals* (rhythms), raag structures, or *srutis* (microtones). In this way claims to ghar being a definitive musicological indication are highly contested.

in the creation of a “Gurmat Sangeet” - that labels the Gurbani Kirtan parampara as “changing” contemporary notions – further exemplifies the hermeneutic chaos within the contemporary renaissance. For example, Dr. Gurnam Singh himself acknowledges that the newly defined tradition of Gurmat Sangeet takes a “different approach” that “changes” Gurbani Kirtan “into a distinct musical system” with a “new approach”:<sup>249</sup>

The different peculiarities of this musical system, *a different approach* and its scientific basis, transcends the music of Gurbani from an ordinary one and *change it into a distinct musical system*. The new context of these musical means, distinct aim and the *new approach of 'Gurumat'* towards music will be discussed later on in the context of the organizational form of this musical system.<sup>250</sup> (emphasis added)

Considering that past practices are being redefined and even rejected in the creation of a new “tradition,” and that modern forms are being labeled as “traditional” linked to being done “in the Guru’s way,” raises the important question of how to advocate semantic and historic precision within the revival, while also allowing space for different beliefs and forms of practice within Gurbani Kirtan.

Prof. Surinder Singh however appears to promote Gurmat Sangeet as representing the original tradition, based on a positivistic interpretation of the Guru Granth Sahib.

*You ask any of those ragis you interviewed the status of Siri Guru Granth Sahib, and they say it is Guru, full and final, then why do they say things are lost? So if the Guru is alive to them, if it is not just a pile of words and paper then why do they say things have been lost? What has been lost? Nothing. We are the people that are lost. The Guru writes “raag Kanara Mahela Panjva [Fifth Guru]” it is simple. Why did Guru write [raag] Kanara? We must find out. Where is the Kanara in my life? Can that part of my life and shabd go together? The result is inevitable. That was simple thing. That for me was the Gurmat Sangeet, **for me that is what Gurmat Sangeet is. “Guru”, Guru Nanak -Guru Gobind Singh -***

---

<sup>249</sup> In an interview Dr. Gurnam Singh states: “The basic difference is Prof. Tara Singh composed in prescribed raags. And the work of Bhai Avtar Singh Gurcharan Singh was of Guru period and their school.” (Recorded interview, Feb 22, 2012) (The idea that Bhai Avtar and Bhai Gurcharan Singh’s work represents their “school” or family will be investigated later in this chapter.)

<sup>250</sup> “Sangeet Prabandh Of Gurbani” by Dr. Gurnam Singh  
(<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>)

***Siri Guru Granth Sahib, “mat”, what is their way, what they think, what they wrote, what their instructions, and the “music” [sangeet] in that whole form, that is it.*** (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)

Prof. Surinder Singh defines Gurmat Sangeet as extending from Guru Nanak, to Guru Gobind Singh to the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, encompassing their ways, thoughts, writings, instructions, as well as the whole form of music. While acknowledging that the performative practices of Gurbani Kirtan precede the compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib, he appears to be taking what is written in the Guru Granth Sahib as, in and of itself, a closed system containing both operative and normative practice. Ironically however, such an argument creates a closure around the Guru Granth Sahib. Such positivistic interpretations raise questions: Does the Guru Granth Sahib allow for individual interpretation? If so, is there an openness to creative expression not limited by what is written? In other words, has operative practice since the inception of Adi Granth meant that one has to follow what is written from now on, or does what is written give indication of performance practice? How do the differing interpretations connect and intersect?

### **5.1.2 Creatively Connecting Raag and Emotion**

When considering the differing perspectives surrounding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy, one of the main questions seems to be: Does Gurbani Kirtan allow for creativity and innovation? If Gurbani Kirtan should be open to personal creations and not a restrained idiom, then why are reformist attempts made to *purify* the genre by imposing standardized raag models onto previously diverse forms, by limiting compositions to only being sung in title raag, and by overall removing those elements that are viewed as extraneous or transgressive?

While we will see that the revivalists agree that there should be an openness to creativity within the genre, their conclusions stem from different sources with different purposes and prescriptive outcomes. Specifically, Prof. Surinder Singh promotes the notion that the raag headings given in the Guru Granth Sahib indicate the mood being expressed in the bani, giving a more holistic meaning of the bani than exegetical interpretations.

*That is the whole of my life - making a link between these keys [musical notes of a particular raag] and the shabd ...we want to make a general link why in what way and in what tone it [Gurbani] is being said. Because without emotion, in what tone will you be able to get the right meaning [of the bani] anyway?...I am not really interested to put musical compositions in a book, I don't mind, but at the same time let people create their own composition... Bhagat Kabir and Namdev, that [bani] was their example of their life experiences to our mind... I don't follow a book written in the 1850s or written in 1700s. I follow Guru Granth Sahib ... the 5<sup>th</sup> Guru is not saying to us, he is saying to his mind,<sup>251</sup> he is saying to himself and he wrote that poetry [bani]. And we can use the same poetry, the same text for us [to create our own compositions]. That is the beauty. (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview by Prof. Arvind-pal Mandair, April 22, 1999)*

Prof. Surinder Singh links the musical notes with their ability to affectively convey the raag mood and thus the emotive meaning of the bani, stating that this enables each individual to apply that mood to their own life through their own musical compositions.<sup>252</sup> However, when stressing

---

<sup>251</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh continues with his interpretation of the Guru Granth Sahib: “*The whole of Guru Granth Sahib, even one single word in Guru Granth Sahib, it is not for the other people outside. Not one single word is telling other people what to do. It is about telling the mind. It is a dialogue between soul and mind.*” (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview by Prof. Arvind-pal Mandair, April 22, 1999)

<sup>252</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh gives his interpretation of the characteristic notes of Sri Raag: “*First I would like to start with musicology [of Sri Raag] from Purbi Thaata which is popular now, this raag contains as you will see Dha, Re komal [flat] and Ma tevara [sharp], the rest of them are shud [natural] ... Then in Sri Raag [the Vadi (main note)] is Re komal. Re is a planner, an architect... You plan with such a cool mind and soft touch, then people will accept whatever you say, that is Re's nature...*

*Now Ma tevara. As you will read Ma is mind and it represents mind.... The komal keys mean the softer keys, they are the people with the very very soft heart, few people we know. And then the tevara are aggressive, you know not aggressive but very sharp... Ma tevara, Ma represent mind... Mind has two elements, bad and good. And Ma represents that. That doesn't mean that Ma shud is positive key. It doesn't mean that Ma tevara is selfishness key, it is not that harmful. Now when you will improvise on Sri Raag you will see everyone striking on Ma tevara. That proves the point. Whatever you do you are going to strike on Ma tevara. Why? That put a question mark in my head when I was doing musicology. That Ma tevara represents the tevara tha of mind, and along with the words of shabd that I am going to use will prove that. Ok ji?*

*Now Pa...fair-weather friends that is PA...Pa is very important key... It is a fight between Dha and Ma, you know, between the mind and and the soul. Dha represents a practical and determining side of the atma, it is not afraid... In Dha there is two Dha, and in Ma there is a two Ma. There is a Ma that is simple mind, but Ma tevara you have to come with simple plan to stop that action. In Dha there is two Dha. One Dha is dominating like a policeman... Dha shud and Dha komal loving and caring but still dominating... After Dha we go to Ni in Sri Raag.*

the importance of individual expression, he offers the caveat that this is only effective when singing in the nidharat raags, which he intrinsically links to conveying the particular mood, and therefore meaning, of the bani.

*Main area for us is [raag] Asa is Asa written there as a raag, what mood is it, how do we get to that mood, how do we apply that? What is the practice of doing this raag even if we are doing path [recitation]? Do we have to be skilled to sing bani or is there another side of it? (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)*

Here Prof. Surinder Singh's perspective appears to promote nidharat raags linked to a particular mood, allowing beginners to find a way to connect with the Guru Granth Sahib in an easily accessible and musically emotive way, regardless of musical ability. Here we see an ideological move that while positively emphasizing each individual's personal expression, appears to devalue the parampara pedagogy as well as the insightful information contained within the traditional shabd-reetes that are personal expressions either created by knowledgeable vidwan

---

*Ni is very very very important key of life. Without Ni I will say life isn't complete... Ni in Sri Raag creates a balance so you don't press Ma tevara so hard so it breaks. You want to bend it, not break. So Ni will keep it balance. When Ni komal will apply then will be balance and well planned, a komal action, a balanced action. It doesn't mean that Ni shud is a harsh key, it depends on the raag.*

*Now put the Sri raag together. If you will write [the ascending and descending] Sa Re Ma Pa Ni Sa, Sa Ni Da Pa Ma Ga Re Sa – now it will start making sense. Re is most important key in Sri Raag, Vadi suar... Vadi in Re and Samvadi Pa hai. This is thought, a plan. Vadi is most important, a function in musicology, it creates the mood. It is most used key or very importantly used key. And after that, the second most important key is Samvadi. Is Pa in Sri Raag. So we are looking at a correlation between Re komal and Pa. A pre-planned, very close to action, a soft kind of plan. When you will play or hear Sri Raag in Indian classical music they will go {sings} Sa Re Pa-, Pa- Re Sa. Sri Raag is based on a plan, very close to action. {Sings} Sa Re Ma – Ma is a trap between two, {Sings} PA - this is plan to do something to Ma tevara. {Sings} Ni – don't sing too harsh so it breaks. The approach that will be on Sa is standard, {sings} Sa Ni, the approach is backwards, when you try to approach again, {sings} Sa Ni - balance the mind rakhi, and also represent the soft side of loving and caring but should be dominant. In Gurmat Sangeet Dha komal or Dha should represent Akal Purakh or Atma, Dha. {Sings} Sa Ni Da Pa Ma Da Pa Ga. Ga is the highlight... it highlights the Ma selfishness, it highlights a problem. {Sing} Ma Ga Re, Sa. So Sri Raag in a true meaning is an awareness that there is something wrong going on. If we will carry on then we will end up nowhere, it is only end is death.” (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview by Prof. Arvind-pal Mandair, April 22, 1999)*

musical masters, or even transmitted as being revealed by the Gurus themselves. In contrast, we see parampara memory bearers working to preserve the memory and scholarship of the Gurbani Kirtan practices that do remain, that while open to interpretation and innovation, do not become subsumed by modern forms.

Amongst the differing approaches within the revival, it can be agreed that raag is an important (and even essential) aspect of Gurbani Kirtan, due to the emotive nature of raag to express the extra-textual meaning of bani as conveyed by Bhai Kultar Singh, 12<sup>th</sup> generation parampara exponent:

NK: *Why is the Guru Granth organized by Raag?*

Bhai Kultar Singh: *[It was] originally sung in raag. Bani first came in form of kirtan. Present shape of Guru Granth is best mode of documentation Gurusahib could have done at that time. Raag [is] part and parcel of word in the form of kirtan. Music was a part of it. Bani and music, they are two super-powers. Music has got its own strength. It can take you from your present state of mind to anywhere. Depends on the kind of music. It can take you down, it can take you up. And same is the word, same is the bani. The bani has power to elevate your mind. So music and bani were inseparable. They came together. Guru Granth Sahib, every shabd [to be sung and not chanted] has a raag written in it.*

NK: *You were saying raag and bani are inseparable. So would you say that if kirtan is not done in raag, it would affect the overall meaning?*

Bhai Kultar Singh: *The effect which the bani is going to create, you know they complement each other. The raag matches with the mood of the message of the shabd. If the message of the shabd is something very serious, and the tune is very catchy, they have no combination. They do not suit each other. Similarly the raag creates a certain environment, because of the set of notes being played in a certain pattern. So it creates an environment of its own. The message of that shabd which Guru Sahib has compiled [in] the Guru Granth Sahib, they match together, they are suitable.<sup>253</sup> If you sing in another film tune, or something else it will not match, it will not have that impact it is supposed to have. (Recorded interview, March 4, 2007)*

---

<sup>253</sup> Bhai Kultar Singh recognizes the value in singing in title raag, and often teaches his students compositions that are in nidharat raag. At the same time he does not advocate this as an exclusive prescription. As 12<sup>th</sup> generation memory bearer, he has learnt and sings many Gurbani Kirtan compositions in non-prescribed raags.

Thus, the revivalists not only acknowledge that the raag-bani combination is affective in offering deeper insight into exegetical interpretation, but that they also transform one's mental state. Bhai Baldeep Singh adds that the ability for raag to convey the emotive meaning of the bani is not the only affective factor. Instead he recognizes the important symbiosis between the *four pillars* as being effective when the musical tools (raag, taal) express the Word (shabd) through a mode of intentlessness (chitt).

*Our desire is to learn how the Gurus did. That is it... So attitude is the most important. Raag, taal, shabd, and chitt are 4 equal pillars. You have to obtain a balance neither is the objective... They are to aid your efforts... Catapulting you from the mandal [realm] of Oankar [Creation, Form] to the mandal of Nirankar [Formless, Signless] where neither raag exists, neither taal exists, neither shabd exists, neither chitt exists. That is the objective.*<sup>254</sup> (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, July 22, 2006)

In other words, the four pillars aid in the goal of emancipating the self from ego-domination towards the realm of Oneness, where meaning and method are altogether transgressed.

*Kirti is absolute silence, when there is no intent, is the highest state. The greatest praise you can do, you can be in, is the mandal of Nirankar, as nobody, when there is only the One, that is the greatest praise. That is kir-tan. That is the yog that you attain through kirtan. Gurbani says "jog baniya tera kirtan gaie."*<sup>255</sup> [translates] "Such communion, such yog I attain singing the praises of You." Let this be clear this time. What is the attainment when you do kirtan? Again Gurbani says it. I am not using an intellectual, scholarly, or clever interpretation or a priestly one. It is simple. "Raj leela tera nam banaee [Royal pleasures are attained by your name.] Jog baniya tera kirtan gaie" do you understand? Jog is the attainment, the communion, what is the communion? It takes you to the mandal of Nirankar where no identity exists and that is the greatest praise that can ever be. When there is no call anymore, no caller anymore, no called anymore. It is all the One - that is only Ik - the mandal of Ik of Nanak Guru. That means the whole of the Granth has merged back into just one letter, the numeral Ik that is it. There is no need for Gurprasad [Guru's grace] even. It has already happened. Now there is no one there to even receive any grace. It is already done. The individual has already attained it. So it is on the Ik. Ika - bas. That is the

<sup>254</sup> This quote was also given in its entirety in Chapter 3.

<sup>255</sup> Raag Asa, M5, Guru Arjan, SGGS pg 385.



*realization of the Bani Guru. That is the objective why Nanak has given us. He wants us to merge into that Ika -period. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded class discussion, July 22, 2006)*

While musical methods may offer an effective path towards merger, the ultimate goal is that they (and any other method) become themselves transcended towards an ultimate Union, thus unraveling the notions of orthopraxy altogether.

In raag Asa both Guru Nanak and Guru Ram Das respond to the notion that devotional acts allow for divine attainment. They metaphorically use the acts of singing, dance, and ritual to illustrate that physical activities are only temporary and finite whereas the goal of devotional meditation enables the Nam to become continuously inculcated within the *man* (mind-heart-soul). Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, thus expresses:

Let intellect be the instrument you play, love your pakhawaj drum beat; bliss will always be produced in your mind. Let this oh Bhagat be the bodily devotional worship. (SGGS 350)<sup>256</sup>

Guru Ram Das similarly conveys that music devoid of divine intent and mental focus is futile, as it does not allow the Nam to grow and flourish within the mind-body.

You sing in many raags and talk much, but this soul is only playing a play....

---

<sup>256</sup> Siri Guru Granth Sahib pg. 350 <<http://www.srigranth.org/>>

Āsā mehlā 1.

Aasaa, First Mehl:

vājā maṭ pakhāvaj bhāo.

*Let intellect be the instrument you play, love your pakhawaj drum beat*

Hoe anand saḍā man chāo.

*Bliss will always be produced in your mind.*

Ēhā bhagaṭ cho ṭap tāo.

*Let this oh Bhagat be the bodily devotional worship!*

Iṭ rang nāchahu rakḥ rakḥ pāo. ||1||

*So in this love dance! Keep the beat with your feet. ||1||*

By God's favor sow the Nam in the body-village and God will then sprout and there shall be a verdant field. (SGGS 368)<sup>257</sup>

Guru Ram Das further acknowledges the temporal nature of the physical reality where playing and singing music (as well as other ritualistic activities) have beginning and ending points. In this way he reminds the practitioner that performative practices are only effective when continuously and simultaneously meditating on the Nam, imprinting the ego-mind with the Divine. In other words, these ritualistic activities are effective when consciously imbued with divine intent, thus transforming ego-dominated subjectivity.

How long must one tune the five strings, and assemble the seven singers, and how long will they raise their voice in raag-song?

In the time it takes to select and assemble these musicians a moment elapses, meanwhile my mind sings Ram's praise. (SGGS 368)<sup>258</sup>

---

<sup>257</sup> Siri Guru Granth Sahib pg. 368 <<http://www.sriganth.org/>>

Mēhlā 4 rāg āsā ghar 6 ke 3.

*4th Guru Raag Asa, 3 of the 6<sup>th</sup> House*

Hath kar taṁ vajāvai jogī thoṭhar vājai ben.

*O yogi, strike the catgut with thy hand, but the lute is played in vain.*

Gurmaṭ har guṇ bolhu jogī ih manūā har rang bhēn. ||1||

*Under Guru's instruction utter God's instruction utter God's praises, O yogi, and the soul will be dyed with love of Hari.*

Jogī har deh maṭī updes.

*O yogi, teach the intellect Divine instruction.*

Jug jug har har eko varṭai tis āgai ham ādes. ||1|| rahāo.

*Hari Hari is pervading all the ages through and I bow unto Him. Pause.*

Gāvahi rāg bhāṭ baho bolēh ih manūā khelai khel.

*You sing in many raags and talk much, but this soul is only playing a play.*

Jovēh kūp sinchan kao basudhā uṭh bail gae char bel. ||2||

*You desire to work the well and irrigate the land with the oxen, which have already left for jungle to graze.*

Kāiā nagar mēh karam har bovhu har jāmai hariā khēṭ.

*By God's favor sow the Nam in the body-village and God will then sprout and there shall be a verdant field.*

<sup>258</sup> Siri Guru Granth Sahib pg.368 <<http://www.sriganth.org/>>

Asā mēhlā 4.

Thus, while physical activities such as yoga, singing, dancing, and other such rituals are embodied methodologies to center the mind on the Divine Nam, in Sikhi they are expressed as simply paths toward the destination, where people can become trapped within their ego when believing that the act of perfecting such methodologies are themselves the destination.

Some sing according to traditional raags, but the Lord is not pleased by these raags.

Some dance and dance and keep the beat, but they do not worship Him with devotion....

In this world, profit comes by drinking in the Ambrosial Nectar of the Nam.

The gurmukhs gather in loving devotional worship of the Lord. ||17|| (SGGS 1285)<sup>259</sup>

Asa 4th Guru.

Kab ko bhālai ghunghrū tālā kab ko bajāvai rabāb.

*How long will it take to search for anklets and cymbals and how long will someone play the rebeck?*

Avat jāt bār khin lāgai hao tab lag samārao nām. ||1||

*In coming and going a moment's delay is caused and even in this momentary interval meditate I on the Name.*

Meraī man aisī bhagaṭ ban āī.

*Within my mind such a devotion has been produced.*

Hao har bin khin pal reh na sakao jaise jal bin mīn mar jāī. ||1|| rahāo.

*Without Hari, I cannot live even for an instant as the fish dies without water. Pause.*

Kab koū melai panch saṭ gāin kab ko rāg dhun uthāvai.

*How long must one tune the five strings, and assemble the seven singers, and how long will they raise their voice in raag-song?*

Melaṭ chunaṭ khin pal chasā lāgai tab lag merā man rām gun gāvai. ||2||

*In the time it takes to select and assemble these musicians a moment elapses, meanwhile my mind sings Ram's praise.*

Kab ko nāchai pāv pasārai kab ko hāth pasārai.

*How long must one dance and stretch forth one's feet and how long must one waves one's hands?*

Hāth pāv pasāraṭ bilam til lāgai tab lag merā man rām samhārai. ||3||

*In stretching out one's hands and feet some short delay does take place. Even till then my soul thinks of Ram.*

Kab koū logan kao paṭīāvai lok paṭīnai nā paṭ hoe.

*If someone will satisfy the people, he must know that by pleasing the people honor is not obtained.*

Jan Nānak har hirdai saḍ dhiāvahu tā jai jai kare sabh koe. ||4||10||62||

*O servant Nanak, in your heart ever meditate on Hari, then everyone will congratulate you.*

<sup>259</sup> SGGS pg. 1285 <<http://www.srigranth.org/>>

It is in this light that the arguments regarding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy can be approached – with recognition that these techniques are only fruitful when imbued with the Divine Nam. Such recognition does not deny the fact that when learning traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan, the technicalities can become transformed into more subtle forms of practice where the mind no longer has to think about perfecting the musicalities but instead can sing from a spontaneous and effortless space of intentlessness. Thus when the intent of the physical devotional activities are done with Divine intention rather than ego-intention, the activities become spontaneous loving devotion (*nam simran*) that renounce the ego and manifest on a more subtle level. In this way Gurbani Kirtan practitioners have to constantly work within the paradox of entraining the mind through such methodologies to transgress them altogether. If the revivalists agree that the goal of singing in emotive raag is to transform ego-dominated

---

Shalok, Third Mehl:

Pauree:

Sachā alakh abheo hath na patjāī.

*The True, Unseen, Mysterious Lord is not won over by stubbornness.*

Ik gāvahi rāg parīā rāg na bhījī.

*Some sing according to traditional raags, but the Lord is not pleased by these raags.*

Ik nach nach pūrēh tāl bhagaṭ na kījī.

*Some dance and dance and keep the beat, but they do not worship Him with devotion.*

Ik ann na khāhi mūrakh tinā kiā kījī.

*Some refuse to eat; what can be done with these fools?*

Farisnā hoī bahuṭ kivai na dhījī.

*Thirst and desire have greatly increased; nothing brings satisfaction.*

Karam vadheh kai loa khap marjāī.

*Some are tied down by rituals; they hassle themselves to death.*

Lāhā nām sansār amrit pījī.

*In this world, profit comes by drinking in the Ambrosial Nectar of the Naam.*

Har bhagṭī asnehi gurmukh ghījī. ||17||

*The gurmukhs gather in loving devotional worship of the Lord. ||17||*

communication and expression towards a creatively musical mode, then what notions, practices, and modes of dialogue are productive towards this goal?

### 5.1.3 An Affective Prescription? One Raag - One Rasa

The “one raag – one rasa” theory has become another justification for adhering to a literal nidharat raag prescription. It states that each raag can be correlated to a specific mood, equating the raag heading of the Guru Granth to prescribe how to affectively convey the associative mood of the bani. In the Raj Academy prospectus, Prof. Surinder Singh states:

A rág is a framework comprising a specifically designed scale of notes with affiliated rules. Any song composed according to this framework *will evoke a mood in listener and performer which is characteristic for this rág*. This effect can be used very efficiently for healing purposes. The word “rág” translates as “mood”.<sup>260</sup> (emphasis added)

While raags are emotive mediums, Lallie, Kaur and Singh in their paper “Emotion in Sikh Musicology” (2012) contest the idea that each raag has *only one* mood associated with it.

Instead, each Gurbani hymn has been shown to convey multiple or even opposite moods.<sup>261</sup>

Nevertheless, Prof. Surinder Singh links the title raag to an affective prescription by the Guru to convey *one* particular mood.

*One is called prescription, there are two types of everything, you can walk into pharmacy and pick anything you want, but it doesn't make you doctor...but there is a doctor, if the Guru Granth is a spiritual doctor, a prescription, if we are following Guru Granth, then why don't we follow it? Music will have it's effect, Michael Jackson, Elton john, Whitney Houston, Britney Spears, they are great people so is Snatam [Kaur Khalsa], it's like angels singing, I enjoy it, but I enjoy it entertainment side, I am seeking innertainment. (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)*

---

<sup>260</sup> Found in the Raj Academy Prospectus under “Glossary” – definition of “raag.”

<sup>261</sup> Chapter 3 discusses the idea that one raag can convey multiple moods. A prime example is that the shabds *Allahunian* (sung at time of death) and *Ghorian* (sung at time of marriage) are both sung in raag Vadhans.

Both Bhai Baldeep Singh and Prof. Surinder Singh acknowledge that the Guru offers a prescription linking musical expression with ego-transformation, however they have differing interpretations of the nature of these prescriptions, whether literal or metaphorical. In 1999 Bhai Baldeep Singh conveyed this notion as an analogy that the Guru's are spiritual doctors who have given the prescription of Gurbani to ease the pain of ego-dominated action, which the patient willfully ignores:

I went to Doctor Nanak,  
I'm lost,  
Take this, go home  
Consume it with the white,  
Seventeen after the meal...  
I was tired,  
I took it with water...(1999, 68)

Additionally, throughout the 90s Bhai Baldeep Singh would state "the Guru has written Sri Raag Mehla Pehla and *not which ever way you like*." Prof. Surinder Singh recalls his interpretation of Bhai Baldeep Singh's statement:

*I was over the moon I tell you once when one of my students came to me and said Bhai Baldeep Singh's slogan was "Asa means Asa, the Gurus never wrote "ja jo tu ji marji" that "do it however you want to." He [Guru] never wrote that. So Asa means Asa. (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)*

Bhai Baldeep Singh derives his notion of the Guru's "prescription" from the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib as well as the lived memory and practices of the parampara, thus recognizing the importance of singing the bani in raag, while leaving room for the parallel lived practices that remembers both Gurbani compositions sung in the title raag as well as in different raags. On the other hand, Prof. Surinder Singh looks to the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib as conveying a musicological "prescription" regarding title raag.

*Playing in music means nothing unless you know what Sri Raag stands for, how it works, and the musicology of raag. Here in Guru Granth Sahib, that many pages have been written. The Guru could have written the musical composition as well.*

*Why didn't he put the compositions?*<sup>262</sup> *Because he put Sri Raag, means it is important in a sense of musicology, it is important that you sing Sri Raag shabd in Sri Raag. But most important thing is you understand what Sri Raag is and how it will apply to that shabd.* (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview by Prof. Arvind-pal Mandair, May 27, 1999)

Prof. Surinder Singh views the lack of notated compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib as illustrating their peripheral importance. However, at the same time he recognizes that **the raag structures are not notated in the Guru Granth Sahib because “they were universal at that time.”**<sup>263</sup> This statement appears to indicate the acknowledgement of the parallel performative tradition questioning whether this same argument can also be made for why the actual musical compositions were not notated in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Additionally, linking one raag with one mood becomes questionable when we realize that each raag has historically been sung in multiple forms. Prof. Surinder Singh himself acknowledges this fact, although appearing to also state that the structural form of a particular raag doesn't affect the mood:

*The raag which was used in the Guru Granth or Dasam Patishah's script was in Purbi thaat (scale) which we in modern believe has been changed from Kafi [of Natya Shashtra] to Purbi. The main thing is the basic information which Sri Raag is going to provide doesn't change, doesn't matter if it is Purbi or Kafi thaad. A few keys, they don't put too much pressure.* (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview by Prof. Arvind-pal Mandair, April 22, 1999)

---

<sup>262</sup> Dr. Paintal takes the fact that there are no notations written in the Guru Granth Sahib a step further to indicate that the “Gurus were not musicians, so they have not given the forms of the raags...they just mention the names of the raags...” (Recorded interview, Feb 2, 2011)

<sup>263</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh explains that the Gurus would already be familiar with the raags in which they were composing, with the understanding that their movements were known at the time. Thus they did not have to indicate their raag structure: “There are universals, Sri Raag, people knew what Sri Raag means, so it is not Guru's fault that 500 years later “os to baad that asi lost sabh kujh.” It's not 5th guru's fault is it? We can't blame him for this. But the effort, we can keep it alive.” (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview by Prof. Arvind-pal Mandair, May 27, 1999)

While Prof. Surinder Singh links the character of the notes to their ability to convey the mood of the raag itself, he still appears to be allowing for one raag to be sung in multiple forms as was done in the past without contemporary standardization.

Prof. Surinder Singh also appears to recognize that the Guru Granth Sahib only gives skeletal musicological information while the other aspects are determined by their performative traditions, yet also questions those extant practices that do not fit with the Gurmat Sangeet model.

*When it comes to Gurmat Sangeet, I say **Guru Granth, he [Bhai Baldeep Singh] says tradition. He brings family in and I say that has nothing to do with it. If Guru Arjan would have allowed for them to change the title, then he would have written it, clearly. He doesn't write anything on slok, vaaran, or as a title of japji. There is so much bani that he does not write a title on anything, so you can do whatever you want to... I am saying why to tamper with Guru, and at least that skilled person shouldn't. And he knows.*** (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)

Prof. Surinder Singh recognizes that there are parts of Gurbani such as *slok*, *vaaran*, and *japji* without a raag heading, which he interprets as indicating that “**you can do whatever you want**” to these sections, whereas Bhai Baldeep Singh has stated that the lack of raag heading indicates that while they were not sung in raag, they do have their own associated mode of rendition.

Additionally, the claims that the traditional practitioners have “changed” modern Gurmat Sangeet prescriptions, begs the question: what aspects are part of extant practice and what aspects are new inventions? Does extant practices and memory qualify as authoritative? Does that which is written in the Guru Granth Sahib serve as a representation of the performative practices that were present at the time of its compilation?

Rather than privileging that which is written in the Guru Granth Sahib as the only viable resource to decode past operative practices, the written word can also be understood as a supplement of the oral expression. Instead of being perceived as an exact replica of a performance tradition, writing represents a specter of the musical performance itself, as a sign of



its lived experience. Thus there is a noted difference or distance between a composer's intention, the work they produce, the written work or notated score, and the performance. Fred Mauk in his paper "Resurrection and Insurrection: Conflicting Metaphors for Musical Performance" (1986) explains that the contemporary "performer's role is not to reconstruct, but rather to deconstruct a score in order to come to a performance of the work that the score preserves." (142-3) Rather than aiming for exact replication of that which is written (which is a questionable endeavor in itself), the choices on how to render a particular composition should instead be made by the "sensibilities of the performer" who discerns which non-notateable musical elements should be used within a musical rendition. (Mauk 142) For example the musician uses their knowledge of the historical context, textual meaning of the composition, and their own knowledge of the composer to determine the use of dynamics, timbre, articulation, instrumentation, tempo, pitch, rhythm and ornamentations. Such an interpretation would suggest that a musician's authority as well as the authenticity of the musical rendering lies in the knowledge of the musical tradition gained from extensive learning from and research into that particular tradition, rather than a mere replication of that which is written. In other words, it is the authority of the performer gained from their knowledge of the historical context, their musical training and insight which are more effective in determining an authentic musical production than those solely based on a literal interpretation of the musicological information given in the text.

#### **5.1.4 Questioning Shabd-Reet "Additions" to the Bani**

Another point of contention between revivalists are the spontaneous expressions "added" to the bani and sung in the shabd-reet. Particularly, Prof. Surinder Singh views these as transgressive because they do not follow the written prescription found in the Guru Granth

Sahib. He points out what he perceives as “changes” to the bani in the work of 11<sup>th</sup> generation parampara exponent Bhai Avtar Singh.<sup>264</sup>

*Bapuji, I use this term for Bhai Avtar Singh ji, he was a great man. I used to say to him, “what if you don’t know the dhrupad? What are we going to do with the vaar, that is the desi side, the folk, what are we going to do with the chants and sloks?” ... I used to say to Bapuji, “I find it difficult when you sing the words are not clear.” I used to say “why Bapuji you used the extra bits from outside? Like “Eh ji”, or “oh ji” or all of that.” So what is the definition of kirtan? Is kirtan what is written in Siri Guru Granth Sahib? Rendering that in that particular manner, is that the kirtan? Or is the kirtan what I know and borrowing some poetic sentences from Siri Guru Granth Sahib and then sing? That also has been a little bit of the main reason of drift between me and Bhai Baldeep Singh. (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)*

In questioning those who sing vintage shabd-reet compositions that contain added exclamations such as *He(y) Ji! Ram! Waah! Pyare! (Oh respected one! God! Awe-Inspiring! Beloved!)*, Prof. Surinder Singh is not only questioning the renditions done by Bhai Baldeep Singh’s family (Bhai Avtar Singh, Bhai Gurcharan Singh, Bhai Kultar Singh) but also other renowned Gurbani Kirtan exponents.

The late Bhai Santa Singh (1912-1966) and late Bhai Samund Singh (1900-1972) have renditions of Gurbani Kirtan compositions which contain “additions” such as “*Ji! He(y) Ji! Waah! Ram! Pyare!*”<sup>265</sup> Additionally, there are extant Gurbani Kirtan exponents like Professor

<sup>264</sup> Bhai Avtar Singh is Bhai Baldeep Singh’s grand-uncle. Bhai Baldeep Singh’s great-grandfather Bhai Narain Singh is the brother of Bhai Avtar’s father, Baba Jwala Singh.

<sup>265</sup> To illustrate that there may be “added” exclamations sung in Gurbani Kirtan, yet not found in the Gurbani itself, see the below examples taken from recordings of Bhai Santa Singh and Bhai Samund Singh. (Gurbani transcriptions found in the Appendix: Shabds; Audio Examples given with Dissertation.)

#### **Bhai Santa Singh Ji:**

**Example 1)** “Laaj na lok hasan kee”: *Ji* used in the asthayi. *Hey Ji* used at minute markers (2:42) and (2:54).

**Example 2)** “Mera Tanda Ladia Jae Re”: *Ram* (1:41) and *Waah* (2:55) used in asthayi and antara respectively, while ending the asthayi and antara.

**Example 3)** “Bhini Rainariey”: *Hey Ji* (00:15) always used in the asthayi, *Pyare* (00:47) and at (1:00), in the stanza.

Kartar Singh Head of Gurmat Sangeet Academy who, while adhering to the institutionalized Gurmat Sangeet model by teaching his students to sing Gurbani Kirtan in the nidharat raags of the Guru Granth Sahib,<sup>266</sup> at the same time does not find it transgressive for shabd-reetts to have words such as “*Waho*” added to the bani, as has been denounced by other advocates of Gurmat Sangeet.<sup>267</sup> In this way it appears that there is a constant process of negotiation between traditional and institutionalized forms. However, the statement made by Prof. Surinder Singh that the tradition bearers have “borrowed some poetic sentences from Siri Guru Granth Sahib,” implies that they are going against the Rahit Maryada that states an extraneous line should not be made a refrain, even though the modern Rahit does not directly proscribe these single-word additions.<sup>268</sup>

Heritage musicians such as the late Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi and his son Bhai Harjot Singh Zakhmi also remember and sing compositions with such additions:

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: *There is a bandish [composition] in Jaunpuri raag.*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *There, there is two or three words not written in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.*

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: *Not written in shabd. According to bandish we say “Siri, Ji, Wah, Piyareea.”*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Just like this. But these days people don’t listen and kirtaniya-Singhs don’t do this. But in old days “Ji, Wah Wah! Piyareea” was used in Kirtan.*

---

### **Bhai Samund Singh Ji:**

**Example 4)** “So kio visarai meri ma-ey”: *Ji* used throughout the composition.

<sup>266</sup> At the SGPC run vidyalas students are taught to sing the 31 raags and 31 *mishrat* (mixed) raags contained in the Guru Granth Sahib as part of the required curriculum to be hired as ragis in the historic Gurdwaras.

<sup>267</sup> Singh, Professor Kartar, recorded interview, Gurmat Sangeet Academy, Anandpur Sahib, April 13, 2011.

<sup>268</sup> Chapter 5 Article 6 in the Sikh Rahit Maryada states that “It is improper, while singing hymns to rhythmic folk tunes or to traditional musical measures, or in team singing, to induct into them improvised and extraneous refrains. Only a line from the hymn should be made a refrain.” [http://sgpc.net/Rahit\\_maryada/section\\_three\\_chap\\_five.html](http://sgpc.net/Rahit_maryada/section_three_chap_five.html)

*{Together they sing “Ram Batavho, Ri Mai Moro Pritham, Hao har bin (Ji), khin pal (Wah), reh na sakao (Ji), jaise karhal (Wah), bel rijhai”<sup>269</sup> in Jaunpuri raag, in teen taal [sixteen beat rhythm]}*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Written in bani is “Karhal” but in bandish is “Karhal Wah!” My grand-grand-father used to also sing this.*

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: *This is bandish from Tarn Taran vidyala.*

*{Bhai Harjot Singh amends his father’s statement by using the modern term “taksal” instead of “vidyala”}*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Tarn Taran Taksal.*

*{Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi responds to his son by merging the two terms}*

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: *Tarn Taran Vidyala-Taksal. And last line in this bandish “Jan Nanak kai man (Ji Wah) ananda (Wah), hot hai (Ji), har darsan (Ji), nimakh dikhai.” This is like this.*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *But in these days, ragi singers they don’t do like this.*

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: *[They say] don’t add any words, but this is what is written [in the composition that has been passed down].*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *In past period ragi-Singhs used to do, like in “Har Jug Jug bhagat upaeiya,” in this chant, people used to do Wah Wah! But Wah Wah! Is not written there, but people used to sing. See in the last of the Asa di Vaar [speaks in Punjabi] “dekhia vadiaia kich kehena” (Look at this great thing that is said) Wah Wah!”*

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: ***This is the oldest Maryada, Asa di Vaar te, this is the oldest, “Wah Wah!”***

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *My grandfather used to also sing one with this “Wah” {sings} “Sajanra, mera sajanra, nikat khaloeera mera sajanra” (Friend, my*

---

<sup>269</sup> Siri Guru Granth Sahib pg. 369-70, Raag Asaavari, M4. <[www.srigranth.org](http://www.srigranth.org)>

Māi moro parīṭam rām baṭāvhu rī māī.

*O mother, my mother, tell me about my Beloved Lord.*

Hao har bin khin pal reh na sakao jaise karhal bel rījhāī. ||1|| rahāo.

*Without Har, I cannot live for a moment, even an instant; I love Him, like the camel loves the vine. ...*

Jan Nānak kai man anad hot hai har darsan nimakh dikhāī. ||2||39||13||15||67||

*Servant Nanak's mind is filled with bliss, when he beholds the Blessed Vision of Har's Darshan, even for an instant.*

*Friend - standing so near to me is my Friend!) ... "lain soeeaa ghat ghat soee [adds](Ji Wah!)" (With my eyes I have seen Him, sleeping upon the bed within each and every heart (Awesome Beloved!).*

NK: *Do you feel the community has lost touch with this?*

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: *{nods head and chuckles at my question} ha(n) ha(n), we think, we think.*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Today's kirtan is just like ghazzal type. When we listen to kirtan these days it sounds like just singing ghazzal. Because this type is totally changed to ghazzal or geet style. But kirtan has its own style. Kirtan is not like ghazzal. Kirtan is not like geet. But these days kirtan is just changed to like ghazzal style but kirtan has it's own style.*

NK: *Does that effect the reception of the bani?*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Yes, yes. When we listen the oldest kirtans, that effects something like spiritual and very calm, very peaceful. And this type of kirtan...*

Bhai Amrik S. Zakhmi: *Just like bhangara...*

Bhai Harjot S. Zakhmi: *Very very much change, change in a negative sense. Not in positive side. But some people, they are still doing old style kirtan.*

Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi makes an important statement that the compositions with the "additions" are actually some of the oldest forms of Gurbani Kirtan, thus questioning modern claims that these are *new additions*, or merely the style of one family. Bhai Baldeep Singh responds to such claims by clarifying that these "added" exclamations are indicative of the *lived context* when Gurbani Kirtan would be sung in the presence of the human Gurus or by the Gurus themselves within the sangat.

The added words were of the Hazuri Kirtaniye when upon singing either the Bani or also the musical composition of the Guru in the Guru's presence they would exclaim their acknowledgement. This is not just from where it stems from. The Gurus in turn exclaimed their acknowledgements to the *Akal Purakh* and those words like "Jeeo" "Jee" "Ram" "Pyare" "Re" "Waho" is from where this culture stems from. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication, Oct 29, 2013.)

Thus the parampara perspective looks to the equal authority of the Guru Granth Sahib as well as the lived parampara. In doing so, their goals have not been to create literal

interpretations or standardized prescriptions, but instead are focused on preserving Gurbani Kirtan praxis as well as promoting its scholarship to inform future creations.

The differences of opinion expressed by Bhai Baldeep Singh and Prof. Surinder Singh are not covert, but can be heard in public forums, in the Facebook Debate (Appendix), as well as in interviews I conducted. Differing opinions can make for healthy discussions by raising important questions regarding authority and authenticity within the Gurbani Kirtan renaissance. To clarify the parampara perspective, Bhai Baldeep Singh responds directly to Prof. Surinder's claims that particularly position his lineage as transgressing Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy by changing the bani through these additions and by not singing *solely* in nidharat raags while also revoking the one raag - one rasa prescription.

Only a person not introduced to the tradition of Gurbani Sangeet would say...that my family "changed the bani" and started "not singing in prescribed raags"... In France he [Surinder] asked about the added words claiming that these were done in order to measure the composition in a particular taal... I told him that **I am a bearer of both kinds of repertoires - with added words as well as compositions with no additions.** I can clearly recall having sung two examples: Partal in raag Shudh Sarang, "***Jap man narhare***" as an example of a composition by the Guru himself with no additions and raag Suhi composition, "***Hatth na layee kasumbhaRe jal jaasee dhollaa***" with added words or expressions like "***re***", "***wah***" and "***wah wah!***" Then I sang the later, continuing to keep the taal but by removing the additions proving that real maestros are faced with no problems by subtracting or adding words. It is not a musical crutch of any kind it is an ecstatic —a blissful —a spiritual urge, an expression, that's all. I told him that **I am glad to have the luxury to sing both forms.** (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication, Oct 29, 2013.)

Specifically, Bhai Baldeep Singh states that the parampara sings shabd-reetes such as the multi-rhythmic *partaal* "*Jap man narhare*" remembered as being the musical composition Guru Ram Das himself composed. Additionally, they also sing shabd-reetes with added word expressions, in both prescribed and non-prescribed raags, thus not subscribing to the one raag – one rasa concept.

I sang at least a couple of examples of compositions which were composed in the so called "non-prescribed" raags. I told him that I will continue to sing these for these are masterpieces too and I attain no less experience. **Both kinds of compositions - in "prescribed" or "non-prescribed" raags - are our heritage.** Raags are raags. **The myth that a particular raag only possesses a particular rasa is annulled by the Gurus.** If there is *Anand* [song of bliss] in [raag] Ramkali there is also the melancholic *Sadd* in the same raag. If there is *Allahunian* [sung at death] in raag Vadhans there is also *Ghorian* [sung at weddings] in the same raag. Gur Khalsa [as a collective] has the powers of an individual Guru.

**The thing that matters is learning** - it is the attitude, the aptitude, the ornamentation of the self, the process of **the self undergoing a cleansing process** - or **eradicating all vices** including ego, hatred, jealousy, deceit, ill-will from within. When within is beautiful - the notes are pure upon being purified by the nectar of Amrit-sarovar and when Bani clad - it is just Waho! (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication, Oct 29, 2013.)

Based on the previous statements by Bhai Baldeep Singh, it becomes more clear that the parampara represents the historical lived practices of Gurbani Kirtan which contain the extra-textual information regarding performative practices that are not found within the pages of the Guru Granth Sahib. While Bhai Baldeep Singh and Prof. Surinder Singh are both trying to work towards the same goal of promoting the importance of raag to convey the deeper meaning of the shabd and to illustrate the ability for raag-ic expression to cleanse the ego-vices to become One with the Bani-Guru, they both work from different angles. Prof. Surinder Singh works primarily from the musicological information contained within the Guru Granth Sahib, emphasizing the emotive nature of the raags to convey a particular mood and thus deeper meaning of the Shabd.

*There is nothing called hukam in Guru Granth Sahib. There is nothing being told to you or to me, it is being told to itself. Inner story of Guru Arjan, he is talking to his mind, look "mere man ek sio chit laye" (O my mind, focus your consciousness on the One) that is my goal "ekas bin sabh dhandh hai sabh mithia moh mahee"<sup>270</sup> (Without the One, all entanglements are worthless; emotional*

---

<sup>270</sup> Siri Guru Granth Sahib pg. 44, M5 Sri Raag. <[www.srigranth.org](http://www.srigranth.org)>

Sabhe thok parāpaṭe je āvai ik hath.

*All things are received if the One is obtained.*

*attachment to Maya is totally false. [Rahao (Pause)] We have to be aware there is dark everywhere and we have to come into light. So if you want to go to that light, you have to be aware that there is the dark, the dhundh - fog around our light, our gian, yeah? So that is main theme, and the rest of the lines will support to that line rahao tuk. It may be in some shabds in Sri Raag, this may be a trap to mind, that all which is being given to mind, or some areas – kanm (desire) are being used to mind, or krodh (anger) being used, like in [raag] Maru, or it is a bit aggressive. Sometimes different different traps, sometimes haumai (ego), but this is the nature of poetry, by Guru Arjan a combination of three things we have been talking about, the poetry, languages, and musicology. Why musicology comes first? We have to adopt the mood, not hard, very basic. And simple. We have to understand the mood that is being told [by] the shabd to [the] mind. (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview by Prof. Arvind-pal Mandair, April 22, 1999)*

Interestingly Prof. Surinder Singh perceives the whole Guru Granth Sahib as bearing witness to how the author-mystics speak to their own mind, with the raag as the penultimate expression of the mood of the poetry. Thus he reasons that by taking the raag heading of the bani into account, we can gain a more holistic interpretation than through a solely exegetical approach. In doing so, he concludes that the mood of the bani can be more effectively conveyed to each individual's mind through singing one's own personalized composition in the nidharat

---

Janam paḍārath safal hai je sachā sabad̥ kath.

*The precious gift of this human life becomes fruitful when one chants the True Word of the Shabad.*

Gur tē mahal parāpate jis likhīā hovai math. ||1||

*One who has such destiny written on his forehead enters the Mansion of the Lord's Presence, through the Guru. ||1||*

Mere man ekas sio chit̥ lāe.

*O my mind, focus your consciousness on the One*

Ēkas bin sabh̥ dhandh̥ hai sabh̥ mithiā moh māe. ||1|| rahāo.

*Without the One, all entanglements are worthless; emotional attachment to Maya is totally false. ||Pause||*



raag. The parampara however adds another dimension to Prof. Surinder Singh's interpretation by claiming to remember a few rare compositions actually composed by the Gurus themselves, which would then give even further insight into the "mind" of the Gurus, not only as found in the raags and the exegetical interpretations, but into their holistic musical expression. While the notion that there remain extant compositions composed by the Gurus themselves is a difficult one to prove, Bhai Baldeep Singh's mode of analysis is effective in that it works backwards from the knowledge and symbiotic content contained within the shabd-reet compositions and the extant performative tradition. The analysis of the shabd-reet compositions (as expressed in Chapter 3) illustrate how the notes of the raag *and* performative expressions conveyed through the symbiotic nature of the *four pillars* work together to convey the bani - where neither raag, shabd, taal nor chitt dominates. Such analysis also allows people to compose their own compositions yet with the awareness and model of the historical performative tradition in mind.

By not subscribing to the contemporary standardized textualist model, orthopraxic notions begin to unfold toward individual sovereignty of expression pierced by the spontaneous expressions of the past other. Nevertheless, the limited nature of oral transmission has caused any knowledge derived from such a model to be labeled as "elitist", under the sole purview of individual families, who are viewed as either selfishly imprisoning Sikh spiritual and musical knowledge, or as simply promoting their own family's tradition. This perspective while attempting to allow anyone regardless of social background to have access to ego-liberation through the musical expression of the bani, at the same time has enabled the erasure of past operative practices for the creation of a normative Sikh musical identity adding to the hermeneutic chaos within the revival. In this way there remains debating perspectives of what constitutes traditional authority and how this should be safeguarded.

## 5.2 Pedagogic Authority

### 5.2.1 Questioning Parampara Authority

Historically Indian musical production has been a specialized field cultivated, maintained, and orally transmitted through patrilineal systems. Unfortunately however, since oral transmission is a limited yet highly specialized mode of knowledge transmission that occurs directly between teacher and student, it has historically also been a dominating authoritative and authenticating system, restricting access to musical pedagogy and knowledge. Because of this Prof. Surinder Singh, who himself did not come from a musical heritage recognized the importance of learning music from a teacher, yet like many contemporary modern musicians, perceived hereditary musical lineages as restrictive and domineering.

*Every ragi, every person, has a lineage and I didn't. I was so worried and concerned about it, so that means I can't do it because I don't have a lineage? I was so kind of concerned about it, kind of worried. So nobody in my family plays music, so I can't learn music? If that is the case then how did Guru Nanak made this for a common man? (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)*

Because of this perception he instead found his own notion of authenticity and authority as stemming from his own experience and expression of the bani.<sup>271</sup>

While recovering from a major accident that left him near paralyzed with a spinal injury, Prof. Surinder Singh turned to the Guru Granth Sahib for healing and support. Through this

---

<sup>271</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh studied Hindustani and Gurbani Sangeet in the guru-shishya parampara, but did not come from a patrilineal lineage of musicians. He states: “*Sat Guru first writes, [raag]Jaitsri, then mahela [lit. temple, Guru embodiment] then he writes a nau [lit. 9, ie-9<sup>th</sup> Guru]. That means the raag, the mood is Jaitsri, if we don't decode that, then there is no point to go to second chapter..if I don't understand very first letter what [raag] Gauri means, Sukhmani isn't going to do anything...either I follow the prescription as set by Guru Gobind Singh in Siri Guru Granth Sahib ...either we do it Guru's way...or I don't follow any other way, I haven't made anyone else my guru. My teacher, guruji I used to call him, Pandit Kraiti Lal Taheem and Mahant Ajeet Singh, these people taught me these things, Nirinjan Kaur, but they are my materialistic masters – they are my vidya guru, but my Sat Guru is Sri Guru Granth Sahib. I learnt this vidya because I wanted to learn from my Sat Guru I learned basic communication with these my Sat Guru, with my self from these teachers so that one day maybe I can meet my Wahe Guru.*” (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)

experience he found that the Gurbani contained bani-raag prescriptions for how to heal oneself mentally and emotionally.

*That is what music taught me, it gave me my health back. I was sick, very sick when I started this. In 1989 that is exactly when my life started as a believer in Guru's way, Guru's Kirtan how is written in Siri Guru Granth Sahib. I got my sight, my hearing, my talking, my physical strength back from that inner composition ...it gave me my life back, that's it. And I don't have to prove it to anyone. I am at peace.*<sup>272</sup> (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)

It is in the light of personal healing that Prof. Surinder Singh has attempted to establish Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy based on personal experience filtered through what he perceives as the authority of the musicological prescription contained within the Guru Granth Sahib, rather than being informed by tradition and musical technicalities.

*It was never for me the singing styles, classical or not. I am more into the emotion of it. I want my pain to disappear. I want my joy to flourish. I want to talk to my Guru heart to heart. And in sangat I want to make sure that every word I am traveling through my heart is in it and the sangat can see and feel that. I never was interested in all those dastanas, and all those very difficult tehis, and all those forms. It never attracted me. I was looking to art to make my life simple, not to make my life complicated.* (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)

By promoting the importance of emotive expression to convey the bani while at the same time deemphasizing the need for musical proficiency, Prof. Surinder Singh's approach appears to be tailored towards the beginner - to make Gurbani Kirtan accessible to everyone, regardless of musical lineage, education, gender, or location.

---

<sup>272</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh further explains: "In June I had an accident... I had spinal injury and everything was stand still... and I lie down on the bed and think – my teacher used to say 'suniyai, suniyai' but what is listening? I have been hearing this, I studied music five years and learned all this, but [it] didn't really click. Now I am thinking: "What is listening? How do I go beyond hearing? How do I need to listen to what Guru says? How do I need to listen to my emotion, to my mind?" And I started listening and mind started coming on side of soul, and a very powerful magnetic field [was] created and I bounced back. Doctor couldn't believe how I bounced back- moved my toe. In three days I was sitting down, seeing 20/20..." (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)

*What will happen to the Sikhs in Cambodia if they want to learn? Or in Sudan? Or in Ethiopia? Can they or can't [they]? Do they have to be Indian? Does it mean they have to be born in a so-called "Sikh" family to inherit this? None of this made sense. So should I choose a different religion- I mean become Buddhist or something else because I can't practice this? There are so many things, for example, why are there different laws for my sister in Sikhi? She can't perform, we learned from the same teacher, but she can't perform in Darbar Sahib. Why can't she? Why is this? So all of these things put together created what we do. I believe in sharing, I believe that was Guru Nanak's mission, to share the good things. (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)*

In this way, Prof. Surinder Singh's efforts come from a deep desire to enable anyone regardless of location or background, to learn and experience Gurmat Sangeet. While accessibility is an important aspect of Gurbani Kirtan revival, the promotion of Gurmat Sangeet and its reformist prescriptions have had the adverse effect of excluding traditional parampara pedagogy and praxis. The preconceived notion that one *has to be part of a family lineage* to be given the authority to sing, promotes the modernist trope that the *sina-bi-sina* (heart-to-heart) learning is necessarily a closed, elitist system that is not open to sharing knowledge.<sup>273</sup> However, the historical and operative reality of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara is not based on one family, where in fact there were streams sharing knowledge, students, compositions, etc. Within the parampara educative system, the three originary taksals produced exponents *together*, meaning that whosoever wanted to dedicate their lives to the Gurbani Kirtan practice of learning, teaching and serving the sangat, were taught regardless of family lineage.<sup>274</sup>

---

<sup>273</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh refers to those who have learned from oral lineages as maintaining limited one-to-one access to knowledge. "[Oral transmission means] I know, only one person knew, and from there only one person learned it, and [now] I know." (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012.)

<sup>274</sup> A prime example of how knowledge was shared between teachers, students, and lineages can be seen with Bhai Baldeep Singh's family, who were taught by multiple musicians outside of their family. "Bhai Baldeep Singh states: "Ustad Harnam Singh was an extraordinary musician – a singer, a percussionist, taus and a sarangi player. He learnt singing from Ustad Bhai Buta Singh, who also taught the legendary Pandit Nathu Ram of Tarn Taran. Bhai Buta Singh and Baba Shardha Singh (lead) were both blind and sang for many decades together. Baba Shardha Singh had become a brother of Baba Diwan Singh (Dewa), the father of Bhai Narain Singh (d.1906), the author's great-grandfather, and Bhai Jwala Singh Ragi (d. 1952), the father of Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh. After the death of Baba Deva Singh in 1884, he became the second teacher of Bhai Jwala Singh. During their stay in the village of

Serious guru-shishya learning was like an apprenticeship where the main requirement was that one had to illustrate their willingness to dedicate their life to such a practice and *seva* (selfless service) in order to be accepted as a student. With this understanding, it is important to acknowledge classical modes of Gurbani Kirtan as being highly specialized, requiring dedicated musical education to become musically proficient in its practice. Because of this, learning traditional Gurbani Kirtan is not a simple nor necessarily accessible practice,<sup>275</sup> where the notion of *hukam* (destiny) or *gurprasad* (Gurus' grace) remains the primary explanation for such access.

In this way, while the revivalists are committed to making traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan accessible to the Sikh sangat through awareness and education, their approaches differ in that Prof. Surinder Singh offers an entry point to make raag-kirtan accessible to the beginner and a wide audience through Gurmat Sangeet reform, while Bhai Baldeep Singh's approach looks to preserve and revive past practices by promoting the historical and pedagogic musical excellence of the Gurbani Kirtan genre. Thus the differing revivalist approaches depend on whether their intent is to preserve, disseminate, or reform Gurbani Kirtan practice.

### 5.3 Reconstruction: Change, Memory, Pedagogy

In an attempt to combat the erasure caused by modern institutionalization and reform, Bhai Baldeep Singh has worked to rectify what he believes have been misappropriations within the revival of Gurbani Kirtan where new raag and instrument forms have been made and propagated as a traditional without historical sources to authenticate such claims.<sup>276</sup> (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 255)

---

Saidpur (Thatha Tibba is an offshoot of Saidpur), when Baba Shardha Singh would teach Bhai Jwala Singh, Bhai Buta Singh would remain with and teach Harnam Singh. Ustad Harnam Singh played jori-pakhawaj with Bhai Jwala Singh for nearly 35 years, which means there were not many secrets between the two maestros." (2011, 285, Ft. nt. 44)

<sup>275</sup> Singing Gurbani Kirtan is one path to inculcate the Nam within the self. The Gurus also speak of other methods include listening, chanting, reciting, or playing.

<sup>276</sup> The use of particular *tanti saaj*, raag measures, and musical styles have been promoted within Sikh practice by linking their authority and authenticity to being used or played by the Sikh Gurus. However,

The verity and exactness of the Gurbani Kirtan tradition was a concern of a very few until the 1990's when attempts were made by a few individuals to propagate the singing of Gurbani in *raags* in the entire Gur-Sikh community. Overall, however, a lack of academic integrity has now polluted the field where the contemporary is being equated with the traditional. In the last four decades newer *raag structures* have emerged, which have been marketed as more 'authentic' than the *raag structures* as remembered by the tradition bearers.<sup>277</sup> (2011, 279)

---

some of these claims become problematic when not historically accurate, causing those who know Indian musical history to view the Sikh tradition as inauthentic. Some questionable claims are: 1) The *rabab* was created or designed by Guru Nanak. Sadiq Ali Khan's *Qanun-e-Mousiqui* (1874) however states that the rabab was already in existence with four metal strings, although Guru Nanak did design his rabab with six silk strings, still in a similar shape and size as the extant North Indian Rabab. 2) The *saranda* has been linked to being created by Guru Arjan. However, Sadiq Ali Khan's *Qanun-e-Mousiqui* (1874) instead attributes the invention of the saranda to the third Guru, Guru Amardas. 3) The parampara maintains that the *jori* was created by Guru Arjan while others have recently claimed that it was developed by the Rababis Satta and Balwand in Guru Arjan's court. 4) The *dilruba* is being claimed to be invented by Guru Gobind Singh (d.1708). However, such claims become problematic when there is no written or oral source of the dilruba being used in the 18th century, nor any extant dilruba found from this time. 5) The *taus* is also being claimed to be the creation of Guru Gobind Singh whereas the parampara predates its creation to Guru Gobind Singh's grandfather, Guru Hargobind Singh. 6) The *sarangi* is being promoted as a traditional Gurbani Kirtan instrument used by Guru Hargobind Singh. However, this claim has not yet been verified. Historically the *sarangi* has been an instrument used by courtesans for entertainment purposes due to its high timbre whereas the instruments used in Gurbani Kirtan have historically used a lower timbre for the aim of meditative devotion. 7) It has become a popular practice to sing Gurbani Kirtan in the *khayal* genre, with many stating it is an authentic Sikh practice that is linked to the authority of Guru Gobind Singh. Those supporting this claim refer to the composition "Mitr Piyare Nu" under the section "Shabd Hazaare" in the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru's Dasam Granth because it is entitled "Khyal Patishahi Dasvi" (without a raga heading). However, the 13<sup>th</sup> century poet Amir Khusro (1251-1326) is historically recognized as introducing khayal to Muslim patronage, encouraging its practice amongst Sufi Qawwals and gave khayal its Perso-Arabic name translated as "idea, imagination, subjectivity, individuality, and impression." (Raja 2005: 188) Bonnie Wade notes that the unknown origin of khayal does not preclude us from recognizing it as a popular genre which fused Indian and Perso-Arabic musical styles; "whatever khayal was in fifteenth-century Jaunpur [under the patronage of Sharqui sultans], Thakur Jaideva Singh suggests that it was ornate and romantic, and popular with musicians other than those who performed at the Hindu temples (1961: 132)." (Wade 1984: 1) Khayal's popularity also grew further under the 18<sup>th</sup> century patronage of Emperor Mohammad Shah of Delhi. (Wade 1984, Raja 2005)

<sup>277</sup> '...in recent times, the newer generation of musicians have rejected the *raag structures* as remembered by the last remaining exponents of gurus' music, calling these exponents, and even some of the gurus, musically illiterate. To my surprise, if even when considering rare raags such as tukhari, suhi, majh and others, when I consult their memory, there is no dispute between Bhai Avtar Singh, Bhai Gurcharan Singh, Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar, Bhai Tabbā [Rababi], Bhai Sundar, Bhai Gaam [Rababi], Bibi Jaswant Kaur, the Namdhari maestros Satguru Baba Jagjit Singh and Maharaj Bir Singh Namdhari.' (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 268)

Due to reformist appropriations within the field of Gurbani Kirtan it becomes important to promote a high standard of pedagogic integrity within the field that does not overlook the past operative practices of the memory bearers in favor of modern interpretations.

It is due to the fact that only a small percentage of the parampara may still be remembered today that caused Bhai Baldeep Singh to work to recover and preserve what remnants remained as clues towards qualified reconstruction.<sup>278</sup>

He contends that it is these remnants that give extraordinary clues to the amount of musical scholarship, spiritual insight, and pedagogic integrity that sustained the parampara over centuries.

***My work has been in recovering the lost tradition.** People do not know the difference between what Baba Jwala sang and what Bhai Avtar and Gurucharan*

*sang... So these so called intelligentsia are making an attempt, alright they are students of knowledge... My purpose has been that the whole tradition has died. It was interesting when people like Bhai Sahib Bagrian and others, when they had heard Bhai Hardhan Singh Bagrian, the elder brother of Bhai Ashok and Bhayee Sikander who had listened and studied from Baba Jwala, had said Bhai Gurcharan and Bhai Avtar are only ten percent of Baba Jwala Singh. Professor*

---

<sup>278</sup> From 1990-95 Bhai Baldeep Singh embarked on extensive research throughout the Punjab and Pakistan, traveling to all elder musicians he could find, to recover what remnants remained of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara as clues towards its reconstruction. He worked to revive and reconstruct the percussive (*jori-pakhawaj*) techniques and vintage shabd-reet compositions to preserve what remained. He was able to revive the *taus* (stringed instrument with a peacock base) and the traditional luthiery techniques to handcraft and play the stringed instruments traditionally used in Gurbani Kirtan (*taus*, *saranda*, *rabab*, *tanpura*) by traveling to Gyani Harbhajan Singh, (1991-92) the last remaining luthier who remembered its construction and playing techniques. (In 2004 Gyani Harbhajan Singh invested Bhai Baldeep Singh with the guardianship of his teenage grandson Parminder Singh Bhamra who has become a great luthier and *jori-pakhawaj* exponent.) Additionally, Bhai Baldeep Singh studied from two other major dhrupad schools allowing him to reconstruct the musical grammar within Gurbani Kirtan. “*I am perhaps the only person among my contemporaries who has formally studied from at least four major vocal traditions, namely, Gurbani Sangeet (Bhai-s Arjan Singh Tarangar, Gurcharan Singh and Avtar Singh Ragi), Agra gharana (Sardar Balbir Singh Kalsi), Dagurvani (Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Khan Dagar) and Khandarvani (Malikzada Ustad Mohammad Hafiz Khan Khandehre Talwandiwalla), and done an inter-traditional pedagogical analysis. The one thing that remains consistent among all the traditions is the grammar of music.*” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication, Aug 26, 2013)



Figure 25: (Clockwise) Gyani Harbhajan Singh (far left) teaching Bhai Baldeep Singh (second from left) the art of making the taus; the finished version below; insert of Gyani Harbhajan Singh; his grandson Parminder Singh Bhamra on pakhawaj and making a rabab. Photos courtesy of Bhai Baldeep Singh. Photos of Parminder Singh by author.

*SK Saxena and Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian both say that Fahimuddin Dagar is only ten percent of his father [Ustad Allabandhe Rahimuddin Khan Dagar].*

*So I met all these ten percent people. My question, where is the rest ninety percent? How would their rendition have been different if they had the hundred [percent]? (Recorded interview, July 4, 2013.)*

When reconstructing an intangible heritage it is important to acknowledge the value of what remains while recognizing the change that does occur between generations, to appreciate what has been lost.

### 5.3.1 Inevitability of Change and Qualified Reconstructions

The intangible nature of musical knowledge and its one-to-one mode of transference is such that the information transmitted is varied by recipient, the time spent with a teacher, the



amount of practice done by the student, the contextual environment etc. Bhai Baldeep Singh explains the inherent diversity within the parampara and the importance of qualifying the knowledge being transmitted within the context of who is transmitting the information, how much they have learned, and what socio-political contexts were present at the time of transmission:

*There were different families adhering to different musical lineages, singing different texts in front of different patrons. Some exponents died young without having the chance to pass on their knowledge in full while others lived long enough with a chance to reiterate knowledge to the finest among their respective students. Some had children who were disinterested in musical finesse and no concern for the knowledge amassed after a lot of hardship by their respective ancestors. Then there were unprecedented events such as the partition of Punjab and the socio-political turmoil preceding it, when many extraordinary musical lineages just went silent - an irretrievable loss. All of such instances, and more, resulted in the varied memories the remaining exponents of their respective traditions kept. Some were a depository of compositions and rare raags while others remembered more of the grammar or very particular aspect or method of vocal training. People not versed with the historical events think one tradition is bigger than the other. Singing and voices could be one better or preferred than another but the knowledge base was equally good amongst all schools. Application of musical concepts mostly varied. Some focused on musical variations while others on alapa - a raagic elaboration of a melodic mode. Patronage due to religious, cultural, social and even political preferences, also mattered. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, email communication, Aug 26, 2013.)*

Since change is inevitable, the process of reconstructing a near-lost musical heritage requires time spent with multiple memory-bearers to gather together the received wisdom, to identify those extant remnants from individual interpretations, while acknowledging those aspects that have been lost.

*I am not just a person who has just studied music. I am trying to reconstruct and restore. That is why you will see many things different from one of my teachers to another. For in certain cases one of their mentors may have given me something which they could not imbibe decades ago when students. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded interview, July 22, 2006.)*

Bhai Baldeep Singh gives the example of the differences between *alaap* and *mangalacharan* invocations between Bhai Avtar and Bhai Gurcharan Singh and those who remember hearing their father Baba Jwala Singh, “*Bhai Avtar and Bhai Gurcharan do not do elaborate alaap... Baba Jwala Singh used to do full alaap. His mangalacharan used to be 40-50-60 minutes at times...*”<sup>279</sup> While Bhai Avtar and Bhai Gurcharan Singh’s renditions are remembered as being less elaborate than their father’s, Bhai Baldeep Singh nevertheless has been highly moved by Bhai Avtar Singh’s *alaap* rendition, enabling him to imagine the ability of Baba Jwala Singh.

*I will play a recording of Bhai Avtar Singh, I have been listening to one, and my goodness, the signature of alaap, I tell you I am a sacrifice and I will not be ashamed all my life if I will not be able to render what he did. And then I imagine what was Baba Jwala Singh... And people want to talk about me and want to say, “Oh he has changed...” Let’s talk music. Let’s understand what music is, what tradition is, what pedagogy is. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded interview, July 4, 2013.)*

---

<sup>279</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh goes on to recall a story remembering Baba Jwala’s talent “*They remember at the Manji Sahib Function, at Guru Ram Das’ purab. All the greatest Rababis, they were all there. This was pre-partition India. They all sang there one after the other. And it was fierce competition amongst each other. At the end was Baba Jwala Singh and he began with mangalacharan. And the Akal Takht Jethadar and the SGPC president, they were all present there and the Chief Khalsa Diwan people said his mangalacharan had washed away all that has been sung already.*” (Recorded interview, July 4, 2013.)



Figure 26: (Left to Right) Bhai Rattan Singh (young boy), Baba Jawala Singh, Bhai Avtar Singh (on taus), Bhai Gurcharan Singh (on jori), Dera Sahib, Lahore (India) 1935. Photo courtesy of Baldeep Singh.

Bhai Avtar Singh (1925-2006) and Bhai Gurcharan Singh (now 99 years old) remained the few extant memory-bearers of the parampara. They learned and received a great deal from their father Baba Jwala Singh during their formative stages but stopped their serious study at an early age to make their own *jatha* (group) and become professional ragis. Because of this, there are aspects of the parampara that were not learnt nor remembered. This example demonstrates how in order for memory to be maintained, it has to be used, practiced, revisited, and revived. Due to the losses incurred, Bhai Baldeep Singh acknowledges how his efforts to reconstruct extant Gurbani Kirtan compositions and pedagogy could not only be informed by his study with

his grand-uncles,<sup>280</sup> but were also informed by his formative five-year study with 90-year-old Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar,<sup>281</sup> from 1990-95.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>280</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh explains: “Many singers from my fathers and grandfathers generations, throughout the community, were not grammarians. Grammar ceased to be the subject from my great grandfather’s [Bhai Narain Singh] generation. And the only person I met was my eldest grand uncle [-like figure] Bhai Arjan Singh [Tarangar], who by virtue of studying the grammar of the laya, could see everything... He played with the finest who there were in the first half of the 20th century.... When you interact with great people you have a lot of knowledge. That is what he brought to me. Among the Sikhs he was the only person to talk about naad yoga and laya yog. He was the only person, to speak to me about laya yog, not even Fahimmuddin Dagar. And I asked, “But I didn’t hear it in the family”, and he [Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar] says, “When would they have time to get into the deeper realms?” simple statement. He was outspoken, he was elder, 25 years elder [to Bhai Avtar Singh].” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded interview, July 22, 2006.)

<sup>281</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh was given important insights into the Gurbani Kirtan parampara by Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar, not a blood relation, but the son of Bhai Ram Singh, Baba Jwala Singh’s classmate, who took Bhai Arjan S. Tarangar under his care and tutelage at the age of five in 1905. Bhai Baldeep Singh was 21 when he began studying with Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar in 1990 until Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar passed away in 1995 at the age of 95.

<sup>282</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh expresses how Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar invested him as the *khalifa* (head) of the Amritsaari-Kapurthala baaj. However, his own authority as the Khalifa has been questioned, because it was orally transferred without witnesses. Nevertheless, it is the fruit that is born that gives such an “Authority of Claim” credence. “I took it up with Prof. Saxena, people like Madan Gopal say on Facebook that I am the self-styled khalifa of the Amritsari- Kapurthala baaj, I went to Prof. Saxena and said, ‘Oh Dr. Sahib, if out of the blue, while sitting under the trees in the fields of Punjab, an old man... In 1994 suddenly he says son ‘you have come to me.’ One is to approach a master who is a legitimate name in his or her grey, he says ‘you have come to me when I am only this much {shows the tip of his pinky finger} out of the grave.’ He was 94 at the time and he started to laugh. And he says ‘but mai tai noo(n) siaan laaiaa, I recognize you, although you are Bhau Bhagat Singh’s grandson, but you are also like my grandson. I have given you sparks, and I recognize you, you will burn the jungle again. You are now the new mukhi (head) of the parampara because strange are the ways of the Guru that you are to come. I tried so many but they were all illiterate.’ ‘How old are you son?’ I said ‘I am 25’ 69 years apart? Now this pagari (turban) is given to you ‘hai pagari tuhade.’ I said to Prof. Saxena that I was shocked, so what do I do? It was unannounced, suddenly happened after a wonderful few-day session. He saw all that I was doing, what I had been doing for these past few years. And I was legitimized. And in the world of academia what do I do now because there was no witness, no reference, because it happened suddenly in a field in a moment unannounced, and now I should denounce that moment because it happened [only] with me? He taught me at the time of passage of that pagari, he taught me a blessing in a language that he said at that time had died 150 years ago {recites in Sanskrit}. gave me the blessing and then passed on. So whatever ritual had to be. My pagari ritual had already been done in 91-92 by Bhai Gurucharan Singh. You know, samagari, mishari [sugar crystals], patasaas [dried sugar candy/cake] a few things that are presented along in the plate. So the point is, how do I prove? Prof. Saxena says, ‘what is this - that I am the head of the tradition or not?’ He says ‘you come and see my work’ here he is talking first person to me ‘you come and see my work, if you find this work anywhere else, you tell me, where does that come from? And if you do not find the work that I bring, then you will have to accept me as the head of the tradition.’ This [conversation with Prof. Saxena] is video recorded...” (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, Albuquerque, NM, July 3, 2012.)



Figure 27 : Ustad Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar (1900-1995) began his studies of Gurbani Kirtan under the tutelage of the legendary Baba Jwala Singh. Photo courtesy of Bhai Baldeep Singh.

*Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar... assisted in both the brothers [Bhai Avtar and Bhai Gurcharan Singh] remembering the compositions from their father [Baba Jwala Singh]. And he has built my spine...because of the memory he brought. He was 15-16 years elder to Bhai Gurcharan Singh and 25-26 years elder to Bhai Avtar Singh. I do variations that Bhai Avtar Singh hasn't remembered, that Bhai Arjan Singh Tarangar has given saying "Bapu Ji [Baba Jwala Singh] used to do it like this." He has given me memories from him. And people who don't know that say, "Oh this [way you sing] is different [from the lineage of Bhai Avtar Singh and his father Baba Jwala Singh]." How do you know this is different?"<sup>283</sup> (Singh, Bhai Baldeep, recorded interview, July 4, 2013.)*

---

<sup>283</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh goes on to recall a circumstance when his singing was compared to his forefather's, illustrating the ability of oral-transmission through generations: "When I was hardly a singer in '95 or '96 I was singing at the Khalsa College at Delhi University. There was an English professor who came running he says, "Is this you Baldeep? Is this [raag] basant you were singing? It reminds me of Baba Jwala Singh. I lived in Asaam and he used to come here and this composition I have not heard since then. This music when you went up it was exactly like Baba Jwala Singh." This is Professor Sidhu in Chandigarh – go and ask him. Why did Bhai Balbir and others say 'when you sing it reminds us of Baba Jwala Singh'?" (Recorded interview, July 4, 2013.)

Rather than perceiving reconstruction as a disjuncture between past and present, instead the scholarship of the parampara reconstructs based on the logic and information contained in the shabd-reets, taught by knowledgeable vidwans, and by engaging in one's own research. When reconstructing knowledge, the parampara promotes scholarly integrity to name it as such and to clearly differentiate those reconstructions from those "traditional" aspects that have been maintained and passed down over time. Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian recognizes how the process of "change" is inevitable when orally transmitting intangible knowledge, thus great importance is placed on mnemonic techniques to effectively transmit the knowledge:

*Definitely there is change, there should be or there would be. But that change comes with the personality of the singer... yes it the same tradition, but this is the best that can come down. And don't forget one thing, there used to be a tremendous sense of sanctity for the gurus, your own teacher's articulations. The students revered their teachers and will not willingly destroy it. Therefore one has to believe that yes, these [shabd-reets] could be those compositions. (Recorded interview, Feb 23, 2012.)*

In this way traditional pedagogy offers tools to enhance memory and thus remember orally transferred knowledge enabling for musical renditions that contain aspects that are accurately replicated over time while having the scholarship to name those aspects that have been reconstructed.

### **5.3.2 Pedagogic Tools to Enhance Memory**

All memory contains an aspect of reconstruction and improvisation. However, there are tools recognized to enhance memory as seen with the mnemonic techniques used by ancient Indian and Greek cultures that have enabled the transmission of scriptures, philosophies, poetry, music and stories over centuries. Oral societies, before the advent of writing, held different perceptions about "truth" "time" "knowledge and veracity/veridity" as well as the nature of the self as a public, communal being. (Ong 41) The Greek notion of "rhapsoidein" meaning "to weave" a text, expressed how knowledge was passed down through generations using mnemonic

formulaic techniques including somatic (bodily) gestures, breathing, rhythm, and repetition patterns. A prime example of the effectiveness of such techniques can be found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that have a long history of memory transmission based on their own internal logical structure allowing the stories to be memorized as well as improvised, while appearing as though they were written by one author. In this form of knowledge transference, there was no notion of ownership or plagiarism of knowledge as in literate cultures, but instead compositions were deemed authoritative based on its resemblance to their predecessors' works and valued when "fitting the traditions of the ancestors." (Ong 42) In this way the Gurbani Kirtan parampara can be understood as offering a pedagogic methodology based on an oral logic through oral transmission techniques that allow traditional singing and playing techniques, raag structures, and compositions to be transmitted and preserved over centuries while also enabling personal interpretation and expression based on those traditional models. Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian gives an example of how musical traditions are maintained over time:

*If you want to preserve Gurmat Sangeet or Sikh Kirtan you have to preserve the traditional music. Even the South Indian musicians, have you heard Tyag Raja? They celebrate Tyag Raja's birthday and they have a conference. About 10-15 shashtris which are their learned musicians, they sit on the stage with about 10-15 pakawajias and sing only his compositions, kritis, they call them kritis, and they won't allow variation or elaboration, they only sing his kritis. And if you ever watch it on TV the whole audience sings it with them, this is how they preserve their music, and this is the only way these reets can be preserved. (Recorded interview, Feb 23, 2012.)*

While creativity and originality are valued in modern day, oral traditions value the ability to memorize, repeat, and create in the style of the tradition. This is not to say that it solely necessitates exact replicability, but that it also promotes improvisation based on the logic of the tradition. An example of how the tradition teaches tools to enable one's own creativity, while in line with traditional logic, is given by Bhai Baldeep Singh when demonstrating a *bol* (rhythmic composition) he composed that matched the style of ancient compositions taught to him by his teachers:

*I recited a bol [rhythmic composition] to people including [Anonymous] Singh in the car and he was saying, “Wow, what a great ancient compositions, of the Guru’s times!” And then he asks, “Who was the composer?” And I say, “Bhai Baldeep Singh da bol hai [it is Bhai Baldeep Singh’s composition].” And then **he tries to advise me to name it not as my composition but as from someone from the past!**<sup>284</sup>*

*I offer this [bol] as a product of my great grand teacher. It [BBS’s bol composition] **is a produce of an etiquette. We are not trying to appropriate something. It is inspired from** - because without Baba Bhoop Singh’s composition, mainoon ta pata nahi lagna si bol da aa ki hai. **(If I wouldn’t have learnt the composition from Baba Bhoop Singh then this composition wouldn’t be able to come)**. (Recorded Interview, New Delhi, March 1, 2011.)*

Here Bhai Baldeep Singh states that it is the logic of the parampara that enables personally inspired creations while maintaining a scholarly integrity to label these new creations accordingly and at the same time acknowledge from where the inspiration stems. Such a perspective appears to be antithetical to the logic of mimesis that solely defines the origin as authentic, thus explaining why Bhai Baldeep Singh was advised to give his own composition authority by labeling it as an ancient original composition. Such active notions of appropriation coupled with the natural process of memory - that negotiates between the remembering and the experiencing self - illustrates the importance of questioning the methods and motives when reconstructing memory and practice.<sup>285</sup> Is it to recoup a self-same identity from the past into the present for the construction of a timeless culture and subjectivity by museumizing, exoticizing or valorizing that which is remembered? (Bohlman 255-258) Or is it a mode of reconstruction that acknowledges the past and allows for future innovation and creativity?

---

<sup>284</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh continues: “Baba Bhoop Singh is my par-dada Guru [great-grand teacher], my dada Guru [grand-teacher] is Baba Harnam Singh Jammu-wale. He taught doogan [double] and kuar da bol [1.5 x rhythms] {recites and shows the subtleties of playing the bol}.”

<sup>285</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh gives another example of active appropriations: “In the 20<sup>th</sup> century everyone says, this is my copyright. Like the Dagar vani, they were not the originators of the term “Dagar”.... Professor SK Saxena said that he gave a catchy name to become marketable, he added for the first time Ustad Allabandhe Rahimuddin Khan Dagar. Not Dagar. Now they are renaming everything in history in retrospect. From which perspective is this academic?... You cannot change the name of anyone in retrospect... You cannot add a prefix or suffix or anything else. If I become famous then I change my father’s name!?! We don’t accept it.” (Recorded interview, July 4, 2013.)



While socio-political factors have caused disparity between the musical knowledge transmitted between generations, when preserving and reconstructing an intangible heritage, it becomes important to promote a high standard of scholarship that acknowledges, preserves, and teaches the Gurbani Kirtan practices and memory that remains.

## 5.4 Acknowledgement, Patronage, Preservation

### 5.4.1 Honoring Memory Bearers: Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards

An important aspect of the revivalist effort is to acknowledge, honor, and preserve the contributions made by those remaining Gurbani Kirtan memory bearers within the greater field of Indian music. Bhai Baldeep Singh has pursued this goal by serving on the board of the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Akademi of Music, Dance and Drama).<sup>286</sup> In a letter to the Vice-Chairman of Sangeet Natak Akademi, he clearly states the criteria he uses for Sangeet Natak Award nominations:

*A 'fellow' should ideally be someone who has made a lasting contribution to the larger repository of an identifiably significant heritage. In bestowing 'fellowship' on a legend, one honours not just a performer but also an entire heritage for a fellow's contribution is much larger to the tradition or a genre than that of a mere*

---

<sup>286</sup> Bhai Baldeep Singh explains that he not only promotes Sikh heritage but acts as an advocate for all undervalued and unacknowledged traditions "The reason for my success, if you may, has been in identifying elders on the basis of merit and extraordinary contribution, irrespective of the musical genre they have served or region they belong to, and prioritizing genres, instruments and traditions that had not been duly acknowledged and/or honoured. Even though I represent Punjab in the SNA's General Council, I was perhaps the first member to nominate elders from across India, such as Professor S R Janakiraman (Carnatic - vocal, Chennai), Ustad Sabir Khan (tabla, Kolkata), Pandit Tota Ram (pakhawaj, Brindaban), Pandit Ram Narayan (sarangi, Mumbai), and so many others. I was able to successfully get honours year after year for exponents from Punjab such as Ustad Vilayat Khan Ragi (Dhadhi), Ustad Lacchman Singh Seen (tabla), Gurmit Kaur Bawa (folk), Bhai Balbir Singh Ragi (Gurbani Sangeet), Neena Tiwana (Theatre), Neeta Mahindra (acting), Raja Mrigendra Singh, and others. Three Tagore fellows were successfully nominated - Bhai Gurcharan Singh, Maharaj Jagjit Singh and Professor Kartar Singh." (Email communication, Sept 10, 2013.) This fact is also mentioned by IP Singh in his Times of India article Jan 26, 2011. "Of late a trend has been seen where the akademi has recognized those unacclaimed artistes also who have been quietly working for the perpetuation of their respective arts. Bhai Baldeep Singh, executive board member of the Sangeet Natak Akademi has been rooting for such accomplished but unrecognized names." ([http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-01-26/india/28378189\\_1\\_neeta-mohindra-pandit-yash-paul-harbhajan-singh-namdhari](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-01-26/india/28378189_1_neeta-mohindra-pandit-yash-paul-harbhajan-singh-namdhari))

*performance. It is a category that entails something extra. A fellow is also a person who has an innate ability to consciously decode an entire heritage and thereby create possibilities of the 'new'.*" (Feb 12, 2010)

Through this statement we see the importance of acknowledging traditional knowledge, memory, and mastery within the Sikh community, not only by honoring the musicians themselves, but also the tradition as a whole. Rather than advocating a replication of the past in the present, the logic of the parampara works to acknowledge the past to "consciously decode" it and "thereby create possibilities of the new'."

The Sangeet Natak awards illustrate that Gurbani Kirtan can be recognized as its own authentic and authoritative genre when musical excellence is maintained through scholarly integrity. Thus we see that it becomes problematic when erroneous claims or un-necessary standardizations enter the Sikh realm because they limit the genre, devalue the tradition of the past, and cause others to question Sikh claims to knowledge. It is through patronage, communal support and acknowledgement that enable the Gurbani Kirtan tradition to flourish toward future possibilities.

A prime example of dedicated patronage can be witnessed within the Namdhari communal culture which appreciates and supports classical modes of Gurbani Kirtan within every household enabling a high musical standard to be sustained within the community. In 2010 Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari, one of the main Namdhari teachers,<sup>287</sup> received the

---

<sup>287</sup> Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari explains his pedagogic background: "My teachers are many teachers. I learned from Satguruji first, his gurbahi Ustad Tara Singh, the dilruba player. First I learned dilruba from Ustad Tara Singh and some Gurbani Shabds. I started at age 13. After that at 15 years Ustad Tara Singh started to teach at our Vidyala in Haryana, this is Satguru Ji's other place. Bhaini Sahib is his ancestral place, and this is another place Guru Hari Singh Vidyala, named after Satguru Ji's grandfather. I studied there with Ustad Tara Singh. Gurbani Sangeet and Dilruba. After that, another person Gurbhai of Satguru Ji, Hazoor Singh Chanda was there in Haryana, he knows Gurbani Kirtan very well. And Satguru ji's younger brother Maharaj Bir Singh Ji, he taught me Gurbani also. After that Satguruji brought Mahadev Prasad from Bombay, a classical music teacher, and his son together came in Jivan Nagar, our village, Satguruji's village. They taught us dhrupad-dhamar, thumri, little style, other other things. After that from 1960-66 I learnt from this Ustad. After 1966 Panditji retired and went to Bombay. In '66 Satguruji sent me and three others to Delhi, Gurdev Singh, learnt Sarod Ustad Amjad Ali

prestigious Sangeet Natak Award, and in 2012 the late Namdhari Guru, Maharaj Jagjit Singh Namdhari received the Sangeet Natak Tagore Ratna Fellowship. They, along with other Sikh musicians and scholars, have been honored for their role in singing, teaching and maintaining a high-level of musical excellence, not only within the Sikh communities, but within the greater realm of Hindustani classical music.<sup>288</sup>

#### 5.4.2 Namdhari Community

The last two Namdhari Satgurujis, Maharaj Partap Singh (b. 1890–d. 1959) and Maharaj Jagjit Singh (b. 1920–d. 2012) patronized Gurbani Kirtan within their community by sending their students to great rababi and Indian classical music teachers to learn vocal, percussion, and stringed instruments.<sup>289</sup> Additionally, they would give financial support to their ragis, and would

---

*Khan and I learnt Sitar. Another person play tabla with us. Now moving up to now I live in England. All of the rest of my learning is from Satguruji, main source of learning. Now I have taught many students throughout India and England. There are good students in England, they are playing dilruba, tabla and singing. Whoever's desire or their parents desire to learn. They don't learn from our Satguruji now, he is 90-91 and doesn't speak now, but the rest is all good. But whenever someone like Ustad Balwant Singh starts singing a bandish or reciting a bol in front of him, he opens his eyes and enjoys.”* (Recorded interview, mostly translated from Punjabi, parts in English, New Delhi, March 1, 2011.)

<sup>288</sup> In addition to Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari receiving the Sangeet Natak Award in 2010, ([sangeetnatak.gov.in/SNA\\_Fellows&Awardees\\_2010/Shri-Harbhajan-Namdhari.htm](http://sangeetnatak.gov.in/SNA_Fellows&Awardees_2010/Shri-Harbhajan-Namdhari.htm)) Bhai Balbir Singh became the first Hazoori Ragi from Harimandir Sahib to receive the Award in 2012. (<http://sangeetnatak.gov.in/sna-awards-2012/Citation/012BhaiBalbirSingh.htm>) Professor Kartar Singh of Gurmat Sangeet Academy, Anandpur Sahib received the Award in 2008. ([sangeetnatak.gov.in/sna/sna-awards2008/kartar-singh.htm](http://sangeetnatak.gov.in/sna/sna-awards2008/kartar-singh.htm)) He also received the Sangeet Natak Tagore Ratna Fellowship in 2012 along with 11<sup>th</sup> generation Gurbani Kirtan parampara exponent Bhai Gurcharan Singh. Raja Mrigendra Singh received the Tagore Paruskar the same year for scholarship in the field of music. Instrument maker Gurdial Singh of Jalandhar has been conferred the Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar for 2013. ([sangeetnatak.gov.in/sna/tagoreawards.htm](http://sangeetnatak.gov.in/sna/tagoreawards.htm))

<sup>289</sup> Ustad Balwant Singh- “*Satguru Partap Singh ji started to take interest in this tradition more. He started all these things. He asked Satguru Singh ji to learn classical music from Mian Ji Rahim Bakhsh, Ustad Oudho Khan Sahib. He himself became a disciple of Ustad Mahant Gajja Singh Ji and Ustad Bhai Mustan Singh Ji. He was a great dilruba player and Satguru Ji himself learned dilruba from him and I failed to mention the name of Ustad Harnam Singh Chavinde-wale [the youngest classmate of Bhai Jwala Singh of Thatha Tibba], he was a great taus player. I will show you all these photos*” {Later in the day we are looking at the photos on the wall of the practice room} “*Pinki ji [Sukhvider Singh] learnt from Bhai Student. Satguruji learned bandishes from Talwandi Gharan, from Ust. Rahim Baksh, and Oudu Khan Sahib; and Gurbani Reets from Ustad Bhai Harnam Singh and Bhai Tabba Singh. Mahant Gajja Singh ji was ustad of Ust. Bhai Mustan ji they both played beautiful dilruba. Ustad Mahadev Prasad Ji Kathak is*

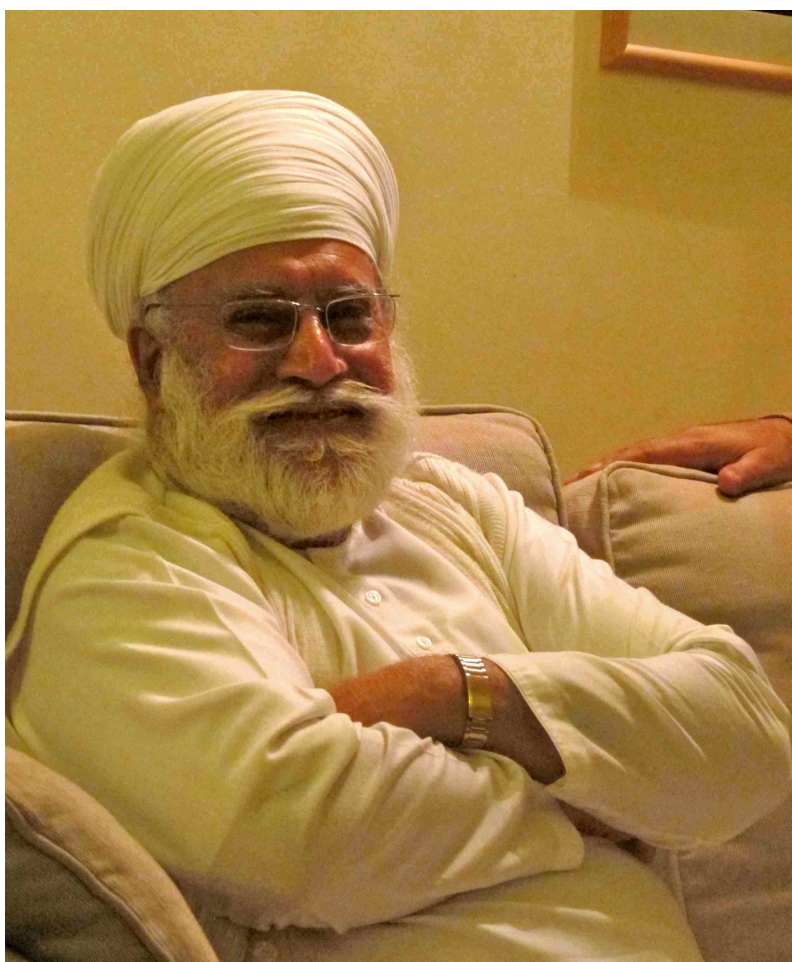


Figure 28: Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari, New Delhi March 1, 2011. Photo by author.

honor them within the community as recounted by the senior Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari (who lives in the UK and teaches throughout the diaspora).

*He [Satguru Jagjit Singh] wouldn't discriminate if you were a Namdhari or not, he would teach everyone who wanted to learn. He would even send the teachers to different locations and cities if the students couldn't afford to come and he would spend from his own pocket.*

*Satguru even gave the musicians, who were singing, houses and a comfortable lifestyle. He thought that every ragi should have a car. So everyone [all the ragis] have a car.*

---

*Ustad Harbhajan Singh Ji's guru. Ustad Ji learned many classical compositions from him. He is not a part of talwandi gharana."*

*Satguruji is very knowledgeable, so inevitably the students are very knowledgeable as well. If the mother and father is educated, then the kids will be educated. Satguruji is very learned, so he wanted all the students (bachey) to learn the same. Not only in Bhaini Sahib but in all these different countries. Thailand, Canada, England, etc. (Recorded interview, parts translated from Punjabi, New Delhi, March 1, 2011.)*

Ustad Balwant Singh, Namdhari ragi and teacher at Bhaini Sahib, further explains how traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan are valued and propagated within their community through the patronage of their Satguruji.<sup>290</sup>

NK: *Is it Satguru Jagjit Singh's vision that has allowed the tradition to continue?*

Ustad Balwant Singh: *Yes, because his father Satguru Partap Singh Ji, it was his order to the sangat that one child from every family should learn music, so he is fulfilling his orders. There are many children at this time who are learning music from me. It was a dream of Satguruji to send all of his children to the big Ustads. So he can bring their music in our gharana. And we can use that music in our kirtan. So these days we will get so many flavors in our kirtan of dhrupad-dhamar and khyal gayaki also. And even the bandishes of jotiyan-di-shabd. These are in kherwas and dadras [taals]. We also sing those of old traditions. So dhrupad-dhamars, khyal gayaki, and all this we have in our kirtan. All because of Satguru ji and his grace. He helped so many musicians, so many childrens. And he took all the expenses on him. Who can't afford to go to big legendary Ustads and can't afford to stay there, he helped pay accommodations. (Recorded interview, April 25, 2011.)*

It is through the dedicated patronage of their Satgurujis that a high level of musical proficiency is taught and classical modes of Gurbani Kirtan continue to flourish within their community. Still, it is interesting to note that many of the renowned teachers within their community have been taught by musicians other than those traditional memory-bearers of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara.

---

<sup>290</sup> On April 25, 2011, I visited the Namdhari community in Bhaini Sahib, outside of Ludhiana, Punjabi where Satguru Jagjit Singh was living at the time. At the time of the interview, the Satguru of the Namdhari community was Maharaj Jagjit Singh. However, on December 13, 2012 he passed away and his nephew, Maharaj Uday Singh succeeded him as the Namdhari Satguru.

NK: *Why bring in all of the flavors and not only just study from Sikh musicians?*

Ustad Balwant Singh: *There is no one. Actually, Satguruji first, when himself started his music, he became the disciple of Ustad Oudho Khan Sahib. He was a Muslim, not a Sikh. Ustad Oudho Khan Sahib, Ustad Rahim Bhaksh Ji - they were both Muslims. And Satguruji properly became a disciple of him and the guru-shishya parampara. He learnt music from him, so many bandishes. Bhai Tabba Ji, he was a mirasi [rababi] and Satguruji learned music from him. So when we talk about music there is no limitations of caste and all these things. Satguruji loved Ustad Vilayat Khan Sahib from his heart. Satguruji gave so much respect to him like a guru. And he also respect Satguruji very much. He used to stay here 10-15 days...and taught all the children here with open heart so this is because of the love of Satguruji with all communities, when there is no community, no caste.*



Figure 29: (Clockwise) At Bhaini Sahib, Ustad Balwant Singh and others playing Gurbani Kirtan awaiting Satguru Jagit Singh's arrival; photos of Satguru Jagjit Singh, Author with her daughter and Ustad Balwant Singh; Images of the Namdhari's musical Ustads (clockwise- Pt. Mahadev Prasad Kathak, Ust. Bhai Tabba Rababi, Ust. Bhai Harnam Singh, Ust. Oudho Khan Sahib, Ust. Bhai Mustan Singh, Ust. Rahim Bakhsh). Photos by author.



NK: *Are there any Sikh musicians, who hold the heritage that you could learn from?*

Ustad Balwant Singh: *Actually main thing is, all these [contemporary] Sikh ragis and musicians, they didn't get the chance to learn from good musicians, Ustad Bhai Tappa Ji, and others. They didn't even know what the tradition is. In our tradition with Satguruji, you will not see the harmonium - it is totally prohibited. And this is tradition. At the time of Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji there were no harmonium in the tradition. The kirtan was sung only with the tanti saaj (stringed instruments) like rabab, dilruba, saranda, so there was no harmonium. But the English people came and brought the harmonium to Indian culture. So Sikhs at that time they got that culture and started to do kirtan with the harmonium. Even in the Harimandir Sahib and in every place and every Gurdwara you will see the harmonium. No one plays, no one knows how to play dilruba. So these days, these people are getting back to these things. They are getting to know that Satguruji started these things from 1980s. We are not going to allow harmonium in our kirtan, so from that time, in the early 80s, we totally prohibited harmonium from our kirtan and we started our kirtan with dilruba, rabab, sitar, and all these instruments and pakawaj, and old style of playing pakawaj, khule bol of that time. So we are staying with this.*

*At the moment you [NK] are going to listen to kirtan with dilruba, in the traditional style.<sup>291</sup> So these people [modern Sikh ragis] don't even know the style. These days they are knowing this style due to Satguruji and due to Namdharis. Our Namdhari Surjit Singh ji, at the time he is staying in England with [Prof.] Surinder and teaching dilruba and saranda there to people of all the community. And Ustad Harbhajan Singh Ji, he is also teaching there. So now these people [contemporary Sikh musicians] are getting to know that this is the proper tradition to do the music. They are trying to obtain it, they are trying now, you will see some people doing kirtan with dilruba at Harimandir Sahib at this time. So they have started it now all because of Satguruji and his propaganda for the dilruba and the tanti saaj. So maybe if Satguruji will do grace, then this will happen in coming years that everyone will obtain this tradition and they will start doing kirtan with the dilruba.*

*Nowadays, they [Sikh community] are understanding that this is a tradition, and now we have to obtain this tradition. In Baru Sahib,<sup>292</sup> Jawwadi Kala(n)*

---

<sup>291</sup> Ustad Balwant Singh is acknowledging the service I was about attend where he sang classical Gurbani Kirtan for the sangat, in the presence of Satguru Jagjit Singh ji (see image).

<sup>292</sup> Akal Academy in Baru Sahib, Himachal Pradesh (foothills of the Himalayas) was founded by Sant Attar Singh (b. 1866) and Sant Teja Singh (b. 1877). It is a school dedicated to promoting a Sikh way of life through bani recitation and Gurbani Kirtan while also teaching academics. Their students are taught to play tanti saaj stringed instruments, to sing in raag, and have all female student jethas, who wear full bana

*[Taksal], they all have started the kirtan with the dilruba these days. So maybe hopefully you will get more children in upcoming days and you will listen the kirtan with the dilruba and our tradition. (Recorded interview, April 25, 2011.)*

Ustad Balwant Singh acknowledges that much knowledge has been lost within the Sikh community with only a few skilled Sikh memory-bearers to pass on the tradition, which is why Namdhari musicians have become students of Hindustani Classical music teachers, adopting the styles of their gharanas.<sup>293</sup> Still, elder Namdhari Ustads had the opportunity of studying from rababi and ragi Gurbani Kirtan musicians and have been able to pass on knowledge of the Gurbani Kirtan tradition to the younger generation.<sup>294</sup> Namdharis continue to learn, perform, and teach the more classical styles of Gurbani Kirtan, thus playing a significant role in its revival.

*At the moment you will listen to this classical music and dhrupad-dhamar only here and with Bhai Baldeep Singh. Satguruji used to sing all these things, no one sings in that style. And that one is the traditional style, the original style. So Satguruji has preserved that style and Bhai Baldeep Singh surely. These are two gharanas.<sup>295</sup> These gharanas are doing kirtan and dhrupad dhamar style. And that was the style that Guru Arjan Dev Ji and the rababis used to sing this type of music and this tradition at that time at Harimandir Sahib. Satguruji learned all these things from [rababis] Bhai Tabba ji, Bhai Nasira Ji, and he preserved all these things here at Sri Bhaini Sahib. So we have all flavor here at Sri Bhaini Sahib. We have disciple of Sri Hari Prasad Chaurasia ji, flute player, and we have our own santoorist, Ustad Harjinderpal Singh ji, he is a disciple of Shiv Kumar Sharma Ji, and I am a disciple of him, Harjinderpal Singh ji. And Mohan Singh Ji, Surdev Singh Ji, he got his music, khyal gayaki, from Pandits Rajan Sajjan Mishra jis. Ustad Harbhajan Singh Ji learned his music from Ustad Amjad Ali Khan Sahib and Pandit Mahadev Ji Kathak. (Recorded interview, April 25, 2011.)*

---

and turbans. (Akalacademy.org) Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to visit the school and speak with the students and teachers. Yet, their kirtan can be viewed online and their program “Anahad Bani” is broadcasted daily at 9 am over the Indian cable channel PTC news.

<sup>293</sup> [http://www.namdhari-world.com/nw/history\\_of\\_namdhari\\_music\\_ii.html](http://www.namdhari-world.com/nw/history_of_namdhari_music_ii.html)

<sup>294</sup> [http://www.namdhari-world.com/nw/history\\_of\\_namdhari\\_music\\_i.html](http://www.namdhari-world.com/nw/history_of_namdhari_music_i.html)

<sup>295</sup> While Ustad Balwant Singh categorizes Bhai Baldeep Singh’s family as a gharana, their family would not categorize themselves as such, instead saying they are part of the Guru’s gharana.



Since the Namdhari community has learnt primarily from Indian classical music teachers, and now from the elder Namdhari musicians, the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century dilruba instrument and khyal genre of singing have heavily influenced their kirtan. Such a prevalence of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century musicalities illustrates a further need to preserve those musical modes that are remembered from the Guru era (late 15<sup>th</sup> - early 18<sup>th</sup> century), to not be confused with styles that have become popularized in the 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Nevertheless, the Namdharis have become some of the primary proponents of more classical forms of Gurbani Kirtan within the field, playing with tanti saaj, singing in raag, and upholding a high level of musical excellence, with many teaching throughout the UK and greater Diaspora.

## Conclusion

Chapters Four and Five have discussed the issues inherent in the revival, while also acknowledging how much work is being done to preserve and propagate traditional Gurbani Kirtan within the Sikh, Indian, and world communities. These chapters also recognize the continued work that needs to be done within the field to promote scholarly integrity and preserve the operative practices that do remain. Dr. Nivedita offers a suggestion for future cooperation and dialogue towards the common goal of preservation and propagation (of traditional Gurbani Kirtan): *“I always feel there should be collective efforts. Only then this revival will be in full form. Only then it can be complete.”* (Recorded interview, April 21, 2011)

While collective efforts are the most desirable, still, within the revival there continue to be differing notions of orthopraxy, authenticity and authority, causing great debate within the field. I asked Prof. Surinder Singh whether there could be cooperation in the future and how this could be achieved. He expressed the difficulties within the revival, with disparate ideologies and forms of practice:

*The classical, bringing this technicality and making it difficult and difficult, is pushing people away. Another thing is called monopoly...Another thing is accessibility...If you want to learn the Namdharis will teach a particular way. Bhai Baldeep's school will have a similar sort of thing. Universities have their*

*own system, Raj Academy has their own system. That is also posing a problem, so people are divided. Students should be free to wander around and learn from anyone.* (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)

As revivalists work to make knowledge accessible and affordable, problems arise when the goal of wide dissemination may promote misinformation or create limited prescriptions for Gurbani Kirtan praxis whereas it inherently resists such homogeneous identification. The reformist tendency has been to rigidly subscribe to what is contained in the written form of the Guru Granth Sahib rather than the memory of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara, leading to what Bhai Baldeep Singh refers to as the current “hermeneutic chaos” (2011, 245) in the field.

While the creation of normative standards and definitions is an inevitable response to change over time, it remains important to advocate semantic and historic precision rather than allowing for a “cultural amnesia of difference” (Anderson 1991) within the Sikh psyche that forgets past operative practices. Instead of attempting to rigidly define a normative Sikh identity, it is more productive to look at Sikhi as a “worship genus” (Dusenbery 2008) by understanding that “Kirtan is not a creation of the Sikhs. Kirtan was performed by Guru Nanak and his successor gurus, by the Bhagats, the Sufi masters among others, and was hence an endowment to the Gur-Sikhs. All the authors actually lived outside all religious, political and social domains.”<sup>296</sup> Through this perception Sikh identity can transgress normative ideological barriers where Gurbani Kirtan can be employed for a “creative act of renewal”<sup>297</sup> towards a new and productive Sikh sovereignty.

Today an increasing number of next generation Sikhs, particularly in the Diaspora and 3HO/Sikh Dharma communities, have been learning traditional forms of Gurbani Kirtan, allowing them to experience and embody extant Sikh knowledge within themselves for their own productive gnosis. At the same time, they continue to embrace innovative musical styles and

---

<sup>296</sup> Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011, 273.

<sup>297</sup> Bhogal 2011, 229.

practices within Gurbani Kirtan thus expanding definitions of Sikh practice and identity. When innovating traditional styles, ethnomusicologist Stephen Slawek in his paper presentation “Fusion or Confusion?: Making or Breaking Tradition in Recent Experiments in the Instrumental Music of North India” questions whether there is a “point where innovation transgresses authenticity?” recognizing that “establishing borders and boundaries of what constitutes the traditional and authentic is a fluid enterprise tightly entwined with cultural values.” (2012)<sup>298</sup> When applying this statement to the revival of Gurbani Kirtan, it becomes important for the community to determine the value of past, present, and future aspects of Gurbani Kirtan - to recognize the benefits of change and personal interpretation and expression while acknowledging the importance of traditional knowledge and its practices.

How can the field of Gurbani Kirtan promote semantic precision, historical accuracy, and scholarly integrity? Can it agree upon a shared vocabulary for those musical modes that are ancient, remembered, reconstructed, creative additions, new variations, personal compositions, or modern interpretations? In doing so, will this bring clarity to the realm of knowledge enabling to be productive and grow? For example, rather than stating “this is how the Guru’s sang” instead it may be more productive to explain: “this is a version of this (raag or composition) that has been developed by (myself, my school, my teacher, or has been remembered: for a historical amount of time, or since the Guru’s times, or by the Guru’s themselves).” In this way the Gurbani Kirtan genre can be known, regarded and prided for its scholarly integrity giving validity to its claims and value to its knowledge.

Revivalists continue to work to make Gurbani Kirtan affordable to learn,<sup>299</sup> profitable as a profession,<sup>300</sup> accessible on a worldwide stage,<sup>301</sup> and respected as an independent musical genre

---

<sup>298</sup> Delivered as a lecture at the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Oct 26, 2012. Unpublished.

<sup>299</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh elucidates: “*I have 2,870 students right now and 90% are from Europe and America. There is not that sort of interest left, there is in India, but it is a very different way of going, very different. But the hard work of Americans, because their survival is not the issue and that is playing*

taught in the universities.<sup>302</sup> How then to maintain the scholarly integrity which includes semantic and historic precision, while allowing for such wide dissemination and accessibility?

Thus the difficulty in this task is recognized and continually expressed through fundamental differences of opinion between the main revivalists regarding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy. While Bhai Baldeep Singh works to preserve the extant knowledge, scholarship, and practices that remain, Prof. Surinder Singh promotes growth and accessibility through abiding by Gurmat Sangeet prescriptions. Due to this dilemma, I ask Prof. Surinder Singh how to work together towards the common goal of reviving traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan. He responds:

---

***a huge role. I think the commerce and the economics is playing a huge role. And if we are to revive this, then Nirinjan, we need to make it affordable, we need to make it viable, that people can live healthy and a wealthy lifestyle from it*** (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)

<sup>300</sup> Prof. Surinder Singh explains: “*We had a G6 summit last year, six countries got together for the Gurmat Sangeet, including India, in Atlanta, to think about the economical future for your generation, how to make it attractive enough for you guys [to become professional Gurbani Kirtan musicians]. I don’t want you to survive from the money you get from a Gurdwara, you can’t even run a week on it. So how do we make it possible, that there is a set income, a good income, a stable income, so you just work fully focused into the subject area rather than trying to survive? I get cd out, I go to America, I make some money, come back. Who cares? So that is a big massive problem.*” (Recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)

<sup>301</sup> “*We need to have more posts in the universities, we need to have more teachers in normal schools, we need to take it to that platform. We need to have more cds coming out, more studio engineering and this in our field has to happen. More films, documentary makers, instrument makers, more outlets.*” (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)

<sup>302</sup> Professor Surinder Singh expresses the importance of the revival occurring in the University sphere: “*That is why I have always been really interested in the university system, sooner or later somebody is going to come by and pick it up. If we really want to revive it, then we need to put it on the university level. Because that is what is going on in the moment, in modern day. When there was madrasas, if there were small schools, it happened that Guru Arjan’s time there were smaller schools. But today we have very big platforms. And interlinked universities, you know, India, America and England is not very far. They can meet over internet and discuss things. And just with that hope we are trying to sing, and share on a household level. I want people to understand what the difference is. What I understand, I really want to share that, how much I learnt out of it. So that we go to Canada, America, Europe, Russia, India, to just share. Otherwise, like other academics, I will just pick up my paycheck from university every month and I am ok. But Guru Nanak said, share. Raj Academy, this is what the basis is. Learn, continue updating ourselves, and share what we know.*” (Singh, Prof. Surinder Feb 28, 2012)

*We want things to be together, but we can only be together at one place, that resource is Guru. And under that umbrella we can be together, and there is no problem. He [Bhai Baldeep Singh] can say to me, “Surinder, you don’t know how to sing” which is fine. I will make effort, I will learn more and I would probably learn from him what I should make it better. I am a Sikh and I am going to carry on learning. That is no issue. The only issue I have - Raj Academy is the world’s biggest network at the moment - The only problem we have is we don’t want to compromise on something which we don’t have authority over, [that] is Guru’s bani. [Raag] Gujri means Gujri. (Singh, Prof. Surinder Fe 28, 2012)*

While offering a suggestion for cooperation and growth, we see the fundamentally divergent perspectives based on notions of authority and authenticity, whether invested in the Guru Granth and/or the Guru Panth, whether based on a modern or extant interpretation, and whether the parampara and Gurmat Sangeet orthopraxy are viewed as productive or restrictive. Prof. Surinder Singh recognizes that these fundamental differences have caused a near-impasse between revivalists:

*And I think we won’t win this war. Myself, Bhai Baldeep, Dr. Gurnam, we will have our differences, and we will die with a very narrow minded approach. But our hope is that they [next generation] are not bounded or handcuffed by the tradition. That is actually where the limelight, the golden era of Gurmat Sangeet will start. When three of us will die, Bhai Baldeep, Dr. Gurnam, Myself are no more, then I see such a coalition coming up. But we have our problems, which is healthy in a way, healthy competition is good. But at the moment it is hurting the system more than it is doing good. Which {shrugs} nothing really much we can do. (Singh, Prof. Surinder Feb 28, 2012)*

Due to the fact that the current revivalists may be too enmeshed in their own ideologies, agendas, and perspectives, it may become the responsibility of the next generation to establish future dialogue. Productive towards this goal, Prof. Surinder Singh suggests that students should be encouraged to learn from different teachers: “*Students should be free to wander around and learn from anyone.*” (Feb 28, 2012) Noteworthy, this already appears to be the case particularly in the Diaspora. Today, there are many students who are learning traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan by attending various workshops, courses, and gatherings, as well as taking online courses.

By studying from various teachers, students can gain a vaster perspective, enabling them to gather and assess the knowledge received, to come to their own determinations about notions of authenticity and authority within the genre.

Although there continues to be much debate within the field, the same revivalist goals remain - to recover traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan from being forgotten, and in doing so to revive a lost Sikh musical identity, while also promoting the affective abilities of Gurbani Kirtan to heal and transform the lives of their practitioners as expressed by Prof. Surinder Singh:

*We are living with the hope that all of you, all of us together, Dr. Gurnam, Bhai Baldeep, [Bhai] Kultar... you are going to meet. Every Sikh, Indian, American German, we will try to live what Guru says. That is the only dream, the only hope I have. Then we are united. Then it is revived. Then there won't even be a need for hospital. I can guarantee you that. If we are spiritually healed, then materialistic and physical healing is not difficult. We just need to line up our mind in a particular way. (Singh, Prof. Surinder Feb 28, 2012)*

It is this focus on devotional intent that is the topic of the next concluding chapter which investigates notions of orthopraxy in relation to the innovative Gurbani Kirtan practices currently occurring in the Diaspora.

Moving into the future, rather than focusing on the differences it may be more productive to engage in intersubjective dialogue and come to an agreement on what aspects are integral to Gurbani Kirtan and what aspects of spurious. This would require that egos are put aside, having the scholarly integrity to recognize errors and correct them accordingly: “If there is wrong things, wrong things being publicized, then we change them publically... Of course this is a Sikh's lifestyle. Not just propagating, not just saying...” (Singh, Prof. Surinder, recorded interview, Feb 28, 2012)

## Chapter 6

### Looking Towards the Future: Questioning Orthopraxic Boundaries in Gurbani Kirtan

#### Introduction

The socio-political history of Gurbani Kirtan has illustrated that it has been a “contested territory where hegemonic and oppositional values symbolically engage each other.” (Manuel 10) Today, the *contested territories* within the realm of Gurbani Kirtan have become further complicated with the advent of diverse musical styles within the Sikh Diasporic, 3HO/Sikh Dharma,<sup>303</sup> and virtual communities. Taken in this present context, it is useful to follow Regula Qureshi’s line of questioning asking “how does recorded mediation affect the construction and articulation of meaning within these historically situated social and aesthetic boundaries?” (Qureshi 1999, 65)

Media technology and commercialization have caused Gurbani to transgress stylistic, contextual, and orthopraxic boundaries. Today Gurbani can be heard being sung in traditional raag, in semi-classical melodies, in film tunes, and even in rock, folk, new-age, and world music styles popular in the Sikh Diaspora and 3HO/Sikh Dharma communities.<sup>304</sup> Recording

---

<sup>303</sup> The term ‘3HO Sikhs’ refers to the 3HO/Sikh Dharma community (3HO-Healthy Happy Holy Organization and Sikh Dharma International) established in the US in 1969. Members of the 3HO community are practitioners of Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan, who himself was a Sikh. Initially Punjabi Sikhs have not participated in 3HO because Kundalini Yoga has been viewed as a Hindu, and non-Sikh practice. However, today more diasporic Punjabis have become a part of the 3HO community. At the same time, there are many 3HO members who practice Kundalini Yoga but do not prescribe to the Sikh identity. Nevertheless, their Kundalini Yoga practice is replete with Sikh mantras, ideologies, and lifestyle (*dharmic*) practices. Such diversity has created a uniquely *syncretic* (Elsberg 2010) community with an amalgamation of Sikh and Kundalini Yoga practices that bring with them varying notions of correct practice (orthopraxy). Specifically, the innovative and culturally specific styles of singing both traditional Sikh devotional music (*Gurbani Kirtan*) and non-traditional, non-sectarian devotional music (*3HO Kirtan*) reflect the syncretic and hybrid nature of the 3HO/Sikh Dharma community.

<sup>304</sup> The 3HO/Sikh Dharma community consists of both Kundalini Yoga and Sikh practitioners hailing from diverse socio-cultural-religious backgrounds. The term ‘3HO’ encapsulates members of the Kundalini Yoga “Healthy Happy Holy” community as established by Yogi Bhajan (aka Siri Singh Sahib) in 1969. There are a diversity of 3HO members who practice Kundalini although some may not prescribe

technology allows Gurbani Kirtan to be played in any location including the home, at work, in the car, on television, over the internet, and even in yoga classes. While creating greater accessibility, these innovative operative practices blur the orthopraxic and terminological boundaries dictated in the Rahit Maryada and expressed through normative Sikh ideology. For example, kirtan sung by the 3HO community (3HO Kirtan)<sup>305</sup> incorporates the singing of traditional Gurbani Kirtan both in its original languages as well as in translations, in various musical styles, as well as the chanting of Sikh mantras and those from various traditions along with personal compositions that may or may not incorporate Gurbani, yet are sung in Gurdwara services or concert environments. While these diverse styles of musicality represent the diverse tastes of global Sikh audiences, their links to entertainment genres cause Sikhs to question whether or not these innovative styles can maintain the soteric-aesthetic intentionality required of a devotional genre, and thus still be considered “Gurbani Kirtan.”

Gurbani Kirtan is historically based on a devotional ideology that blurs orthopraxic boundaries where divine experience is accessed and revealed through musical compositions, sung in local vernaculars for nonpartisan accessibility to the Bani Guru. Still, 13<sup>th</sup> generation Gurbani Kirtan exponent Bhai Baldeep Singh clearly differentiates the aim of Gurbani Kirtan from *bhakti* devotion by stating:

---

to the Sikh identity. Nevertheless, their Kundalini Yoga practices are replete with Sikh mantras, ideologies, and lifestyle (dharmic) practices as taught by Yogi Bhajan, who himself was a Sikh.

<sup>305</sup> I refer to the music sung by the 3HO and 3HO Sikh communities as ‘3HO Kirtan’ due to the music’s devotional and uplifting intent rather than entertainment focus. 3HO Kirtan is a devotional music genre which includes the singing of traditional Gurbani Kirtan as well as yogic mantras and devotional poetry sung in a variety of musical styles including Indian classical and semi classical, new-age, world, electronic, soul, hip hop, folk, rock, and funk. In addition to incorporating various musical styles into 3HO Kirtan, its lyrics include Sikh hymns in the Gurbani language with translations also sung in the mother tongue of the local 3HO communities. 3HO Kirtan as a complete devotional activity includes cultural, linguistic, ideological and expressive practices from various religious (Judeo-Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu) and cultural (North and South American, European, African, and pan-Asian) backgrounds.



*Gurbani is not merely devotional bhakti. There you just have to do the worship “jai ram jai ram”, “hari krishna”, “om nama shivae”...those are mere euologies... Here we say there is nowhere to ask boons from and there is no one to give the boons. I am the temple of Akal and the One. The worshiper is me and the one I worship is within. The dynamics are totally changed. It is about gian.*  
(Recorded interview, July 11, 2012.)

The nuanced reality of Gurbani Kirtan can be understood not as a mode of bhakti that requests divine benefits based on an economy of exchange but instead as a transformational devotional activity that deconstructs the self-other dichotomy altogether. It therefore remains important to maintain a distinction within Gurbani Kirtan between music whose purpose is *nirankari* (to deconstruct the ego-self), *darbari* (to please a patron), or *bazaari* (for public appeal) as expressed by Maharaj Thakur Singh Ji<sup>306</sup> to Bhai Baldeep Singh who further explains:

*Darbari musicians, their objective was totally different -Their isht (desire) was to please a patron... Other traditions have worshipped a sargun [form], We the GurSikhs ...don't worship the dead, an idol, a shape or size or form or a video-conference with God through an idol. We don't believe 'only if I go in a certain place then my telephone line will connect.' The temple is this. {points to self} I am the worshiper and the deity is within. No color, caste, creed, language.*  
(Recorded interview, July 11, 2012.)

Both the history and contemporary practice of Indian devotional music illustrates how the language and musical style may change to suit particular audiences, while it is the textual content, intent, and *rasa* that appear to remain important factors in making the distinction between devotional and entertainment music.

Over time, the concept of *rasa* has evolved from sensory-emotive to “sacred” enabling a better understanding of the contemporary issues Sikhs may have when Gurbani is being integrated with entertainment musicality (film, folk, rock, new age, etc.), venues (concert stage,

---

<sup>306</sup> The late Maharaj Thakur Singh Ji was a musical prodigy, Gurbani Kirtan mystic and exponent, prime student of Giani Gian Singh Almast, and lived in anonymity in his later years. I was blessed to have spent time with him and his serviceful sangat (who referred to him lovingly as Hazoor Pitaji) at his farm in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab.

clubs, festivals), embodied actions (dancing and other forms of movement), and aims (emotional attachments, commercial popularity). Over the centuries, the terminology along with the music has evolved to connote various forms, styles and functions. This transformation has been affected by changes in musical pedagogy, patronage, and distribution from the more individually specialized realms to the more accessible public spheres which in turn has affected aesthetic preferences and influenced musical production.

As contemporary practices continue to question orthopraxic conventions, modern Sikh ideology strives to institutionalize a normative identity by privileging the authority of the recorded Word over the lived operative practices remembered and experienced by the Guru Panth. By exploring the dichotomies between lived practice and normative ideology, I question how to maintain the respect and devotional intentionality accorded the Bani as the living Guru while allowing for the possibility of current and future operative practices. In doing so, I hope to elucidate how Gurbani Kirtan is most productively understood as an experiential methodology that embodies the Bani as Guru within the self thus transforming Sikh subjectivity and deconstructing notions of orthopraxy.

## 6.1 (Re)negotiating Orthopraxy in the Presence of the Bani Guru

ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰੇ

Baṇī gurū gurū hai baṇī vich baṇī amṛit sāre

*The Bani is Guru and Guru is the Bani*

*Within the Bani, the Ambrosial Nectar is contained*<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>307</sup> SGGS pg. 982, Raag Nat, M 4: Guru Ram Das.

This insight given by Guru Ram Das, sung in raag Nat, that “the Bani is the Guru and the Guru is the Bani” questions whether the Guru becomes enlivened and embodied within the practitioner when the Bani is evoked through reciting, singing and listening. If so, this ability further questions modern orthopraxic conventions that limit the Gurbani to normative prescriptions or limit the Guru to a physical location and context. The diverse styles of Gurbani Kirtan found today additionally question whether they necessitate the same orthopraxic treatment as more conventional forms, whether being sung in the Gurbani language or in the Gurdwara in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Does Gurbani Kirtan being sung in a Gurdwara have a different context and purpose than a concert setting and therefore necessitate differing orthopraxic expectations with regards to the musician and sangat participation? Does being in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib in the Gurdwara elicit a different devotional response than Gurbani sung in the concert format? In other words, is Gurbani sung in a concert viewed as a performance to entertain the audience or is it still considered a devotional activity, further questioning – is Gurbani Kirtan defined by its context and location?<sup>308</sup>

---

<sup>308</sup> In relation to the notion of ‘performing’ Gurbani, Prabhu Nam Kaur (mother of the popular 3HO Kirtan musician Snatam) retells a story about when the LA sangat gathered for *Baisakhi* honoring her with a *saropa* (shawl) for playing Gurbani Kirtan. Yogi Bhajan put the *saropa* around her neck and said ‘it is an honor to sing Gurbani Kirtan.’ This straightforward perspective has remained a reminder for her to not think ‘oh I have done something great and I am being honored by the sangat’ but rather to remember that ‘it is a huge honor to be able to sing this bani, Gurbani Kirtan, and if I ever think anything else, that statement stays with me and I go back to it.... If I ever think it is a performance, it’s not.’ (Kaur, Prabhu Nam, recorded interview, July 24, 2012.)

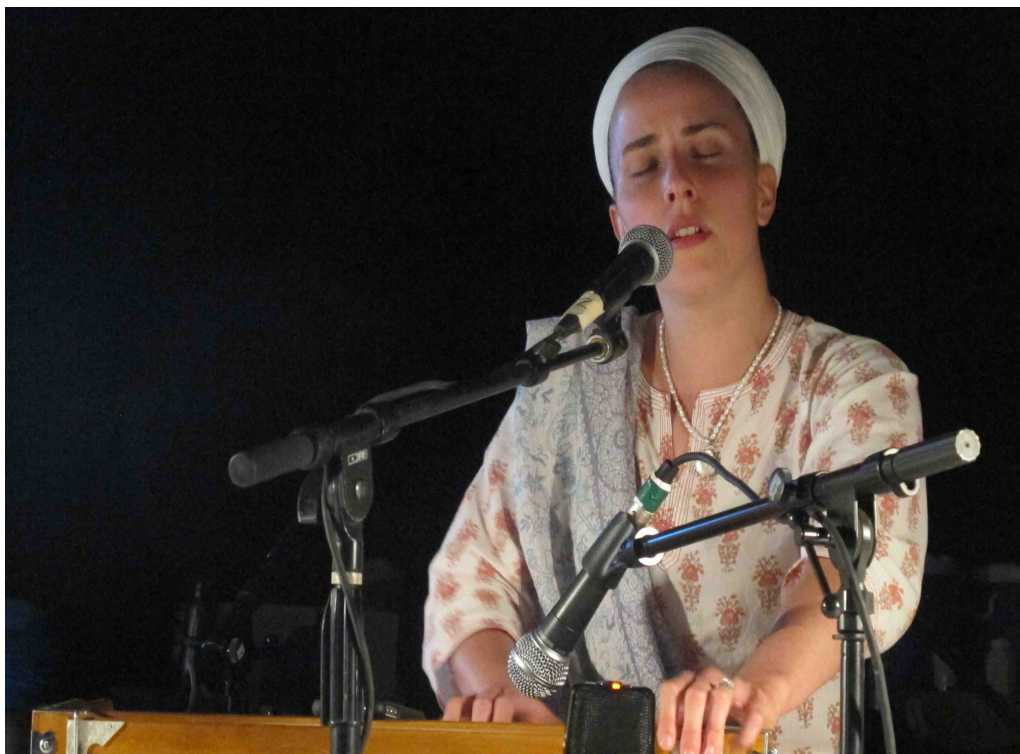


Figure 30: Nirinjan Kaur playing Gurbani Kirtan shabd, "Saas saas simro gobind" at a rehnsabhai (continuous playing of kirtan throughout the night) in Espanola, NM June 22, 2012. Photo by author.

Nirinjan Kaur, a musician in her twenties whose kirtan is produced through *Spirit Voyage* (a 3HO Kirtan recording label), expresses her first experience of singing Gurbani Kirtan in a concert venue as apposed to in the Gurdwara.<sup>309</sup> She expresses how, within the concert setting, it was her role to evoke the Guru within the Bani without the physical presence of the Guru Granth Sahib.

*In the Gurdwara the Guru is holding the space, and everyone is there in devotion to the Guru and you are supporting that process of Gurdwara. It is a similar process in a concert...but the physical Guru is not there as a focal point, so you are just making the music and you have to bring the vibration of the Guru through just the music. And so it can be challenging, it can be more challenging than in the Gurdwara. (Recorded interview, June 17, 2012.)*

---

<sup>309</sup> Nirinjan Kaur, like many 3HO Kirtan musicians sing in the languages of Gurbani as well as in translation, most often in English.



Figure 31: Audience dancing to Gurunam Singh (second from left) playing 3HO Kirtan. Sat Nam Fest in Waynesboro, PN, September 2011. Photo by Joe Longo.

Another popular musician for *Spirit Voyage*, Gurunam Singh<sup>310</sup> similarly deconstructs his own connection to the Bani Guru. Through his own spiritual practice he came to the awareness that it was not only his role to evoke the Guru as Bani for an external audience, but also for himself, when doing his own personal practice.

*And the one thing I need to, and everyone needs to not loose sight of is... the importance of the personal practice because if you don't have [it], if you are not singing to Divine when on your own then you can just get lost and not have your own center when you are singing in front of others because you loose the connection to the Divine. (Recorded interview, June 17, 2012.)*

---

<sup>310</sup> Gurunam Singh became a Sikh in his twenties and wears *nihang* (Sikh warrior) style garb when he performs.



Figure 32: Snatam Kaur in concert (with Ramesh Kannan). *Seduction of Spirit: Music and Meditation and Yoga Retreat* held at the Chopra Center in Carlsbad, CA, April 25, 2012. (Photo by author.)

Snatam Kaur grew up in 3HO/Sikh Dharma and has become an extremely popular artist not only for *Spirit Voyage*,<sup>311</sup> but also within the global kirtan community. Her music is often heard at yoga studios, has its own channel on Pandora, and has been featured in many spiritually-focused magazines, including a special feature in *The Oprah Magazine* (April 2012).<sup>312</sup> Snatam's

<sup>311</sup> I asked Guru Ganesha about how he started Spirit Voyage, he responds, "There was so much music in the Dharma that was so beautiful, but there have been some really nice recordings, from like 1970-1999 or 2000 but I thought that there wasn't that much that was recorded at the caliber that was commensary [sic] to the music and the artist. And in particular I felt like Snatam Kaur... had this incredible gift. Whenever I heard her sing, from the time she was a teenager, it had a really deep impact on me and I could see the impact it had on other people. There is some special quality, purity that comes thorough, she is like an extra-terrestrial and it is clearly his divine intervention going on. And I felt like she in particular needed to be recorded properly... Prem [her first solo album] soared... it's kind of like Spirit Voyage was kind of you know, built around Snatam, and by far we sell ten Snatam albums for every one album." (Recorded interview March 15, 2012.)

<sup>312</sup> In her article 'Delicious Experiences: How Oprah Celebrated Her 58th Birthday' Oprah explains how her friend Maria Shriver surprised her on her birthday with a concert from Snatam. Maria listened to Snatam nightly before bed and Oprah listened to before her daily meditation practice. This example



commercial popularity is mostly likely due to the fact that her devotional intent clearly comes through in her singing. Before it became her career, she spent many years singing kirtan as her own personal devotional practice. Through this practice she came to the conclusion that regardless of where she was singing or whom she was singing for, it was important to maintain the perspective that kirtan is a devotional service to the Bani Guru and not to please audiences.

*In my early 20s the Siri Singh Sahib [Yogi Bhajan] asked me and two other people to play in the Gurdwara every night, ... to do Kirtan and to do Rehras afterwards. Many people came, you know for a small community, 20 people would come. Pretty soon the musicians I had been playing with couldn't make it anymore, for whatever reason, it was just me. I remember one night, I was wondering, what am I doing this for, there is nobody coming, and I had this sudden realization...that it wasn't for serving people, but it was for serving the Guru. The connection became very solid within me. (Recorded interview, June 24, 2012.)*

To further unravel whether Gurbani is context and location dependent, I asked Bhai Kultar Singh, 11<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara, about the orthopraxic expectations when Gurbani is being sung at 3HO Kirtan concerts where dancing may occur.<sup>313</sup> Importantly he deconstructs the notion that the Guru is primarily linked to the physical body of the Guru Granth Sahib, by instead noting that the “Bani is the Guru”.

NK: *What if Gurbani is being sung, not in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib?*

---

illustrates how Snatam's divine intent comes through her music transgressing cultural and linguistic barriers.

<<http://www.oprah.com/spirit/How-Oprah-Celebrated-Her-58th-Birthday>>

<sup>313</sup> Within the 3HO and 3HO Sikh community there are differences of opinions with regards to dancing when Gurbani is sung in different styles, translations, or in excerpts. Most 3HO members who are Sikhs (particularly those Amritdhari Khalsa 3HO Sikhs) adhere to the normative orthopraxic expectations of quiescent listening and are therefore uncomfortable when people in the audience dance when Gurbani is sung, particularly in its originary language(s). While the debate is ongoing, it is clear that sexually suggestive forms of dancing are inappropriate and the 3HO Kirtan musicians whom I spoke with work to educate their audiences about this fact.

*Bhai Kultar Singh: Well, if Gurbani is being sung, the Guru is present. Bani is Guru, so when Gurbani is sung, no dancing should happen.*<sup>314</sup> (Recorded interview, Espanola, NM, July 28, 2012.)

While equating the Bani with Guru, regardless of context or location, Bhai Kultar Singh does however offer the caveat that translations are not invested with the authority and authenticity of the original Gurbani and therefore Gurbani in translation is not considered the Guru and does not require the same orthopraxic conventions.



Figure 33: (Clockwise) Bhai Manmohan Singh, Bhai Kultar Singh, and Bhai Swarn Singh playing Gurbani Kirtan in Espanola, NM, June 25, 2008. Photo by Shanti K Khalsa.

<sup>314</sup> Bhai Kultar Singh continues: “You were asking about dancing, there is a protocol in Gurdwara we have to follow. Dancing has never happened, it has never happened in presence of Guru Granth Sahib, and that should never happen because it has never happened. Now some people have started dancing while they are sitting, like doing Wahe Guru Wahe Guru Wahe Guru, they are moving their heads and shoulders or something. I think that should also be stopped. Whether you are dancing while standing or dancing while sitting, that is exactly the same thing” (Recorded interview, July 28, 2012.)



NK: *And if it is Gurbani, but translated into English, is that different?*

Bhai Kultar Singh: *I would never give a translation equal status to Gurbani, translation will never be same as Gurbani, because who translates it? Humans, we always pollute it with our own intellect.*

NK: *So even if it is bani, but is translation, maybe there is more lenience?*

Bhai Kultar Singh: *If it is translation, then it is not bani, and you can do anything with that.* (Recorded interview, July 28, 2012.)

While such an interpretation has interesting implications on orthopraxy surrounding 3HO Kirtan that is often sung in translation,<sup>315</sup> the translation question aside, Bhai Kultar Singh's statement that "the Guru is the Bani" creates the understanding that whenever Gurbani is evoked, whether through listening, reading, reciting, singing, or embodied via movement, the Guru is present.<sup>316</sup> The deterritorialization of the Guru as Bani blurs the contextual orthopraxic

---

<sup>315</sup> Verne Dusenbery in "Word as Guru" (1992) explored similar notions surrounding the efficacy of the Gurbani words themselves concluding that Sikhs perceive the spoken Gurmukhi as affective whether or not it is intelligible, thus not requiring translation. Dusenbery states that this represents Sikhs' "nondualistic ideology of language" that does not privilege semantico-referential meaning as does the West's "dualistic ideology of language." This non-dualistic ideology of language appears to be supported by both 3HO/Sikh Dharma spiritual teacher Siri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhajan as well as Bhai Kultar Singh, who perceive that the expression of Gurbani is a divine endeavor regardless of intelligibility and that the poetic hymns are in a sense untranslatable. However, such perspectives have the potential of creating Gurbani into a "talisman" (McLeod) or "charm" (Cole) (Dusenbery 1992, 398) that reaffirm Hindu theistic notions of mantra, which are ultimately dualistic ideologies. Despite these linguistic issues, Bhai Kultar Singh's notion that translations are not Gurbani further unravels the debate regarding the use of "Celestial Communication" arm movements within 3HO/Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras and dance at concert venues because these movements are often done to Gurbani in translation. Nevertheless, many 3HO Sikhs still perceive Gurbani in translation as the Guru – where the continuous akand path readings of the Guru Granth are read both in translation and in Gurmukhi. Therefore 3HO Sikhs may perceive that translations necessitate certain orthopraxic conventions whereas other Sikhs may perceive that the "presence" of the Guru is only evoked within the Gurbani language itself, questioning whether or not dance would be appropriate.

<sup>316</sup> Bhai Kultar Singh not only interprets movement as being inappropriate in the Gurdwara, "because it has never been a part of historical Sikh practice," but also goes on to state that all forms of movement are inappropriate anytime Gurbani is being sung or recited regardless of locale, be it in the Gurdwara, home, or concert setting. Noteworthy Bhai Kultar Singh's interpretation limits any form of dance or movement when Gurbani is sung whereas Bhai Baldeep Singh's interpretation recognizes ecstatic dance and certain forms of movement by both musicians and the sangat as being natural forms of divine expression even if not historically operative in Sikh practice.

boundaries imposed by its physicality and has interesting implications with the advent of media technology and internet accessibility, that enable access to diverse styles and ways to practice Gurbani Kirtan.

### 6.1.1 Gurbani Kirtan in the Sikh Diaspora

Today in the Sikh diaspora and 3HO Sikh communities, Gurbani is being performed in multifarious musical styles, languages, and venues in conjunction with an array of embodied movements.<sup>317</sup> These multifarious styles of expression are then produced, marketed, and sold through physical media or internet sources to heterogeneous audiences. Such a wide diversity of musical styles, practices, and venues questions whether or not these forms can be termed *Gurbani Kirtan*, whether they are ensnared with commercialization, and whether or not such musicality should heed extant protocols and orthopraxic expectations surrounding the Bani Guru.

A prime example of emergent Gurbani Kirtan musical identities is ANHAD, a group of Khalsa Sikh diasporic youth from Malaysia who in 2012 released their first rock-inspired album *Live Unheard*.<sup>318</sup> Their band fuses Gurbani lyrics sung to progressive rock melodies and

---

Bhai Baldeep Singh: *In the Gurbani Kirtan tradition, in our mode of meditation we have taken geetam (song) and vadyam (instruments), we do not have nritya (dance) as a mode of spiritual practice in our panth.*

NK: *So there is not a proscription against dancing?*

Bhai Baldeep Singh: *You know dance as such was used as a form of meditation, as a devotional practice. We do not have that. There is no discussion on that. In the Golden Temple there has never been, in whole of the mainstream Sikh practice, there has never been an exponent of the Gurus court who has stood in front of the Akaal and has done a dance, it has never happened. But if I am intoxicated with the Nam, and I am walking, like I am in a dance, and you say now I am forbidden? [On the other hand] Yes, it would be odd if I am in a high state when I am singing and suddenly get up and start dancing in the Golden Temple. It would be odd because that is not a form of meditation. But yes, if someone is suddenly emancipated and in a state of Anand, and gets up and hails, that is alright because it is not a form of worship, it is an expression of someone's joy, it is different. (Recorded interview, July 12, 2012.)*

<sup>317</sup> The diversity of Gurbani Kirtan practices include: musical styles (new-age, world, folk, rock, operatic, filmi, electronica, bhagara, etc.); languages (English, Spanish, European, South American, and East Asian, etc.); venues (concerts, festivals, yoga classes, etc.); embodied movements (dancing, yoga, celestial communication, etc.)

<sup>318</sup> ANHAD appears to be the only Punjabi heritage band that sings Gurbani to rock tunes (although there are other Punjabi and non-Punjabi Sikhs who have become popular rock musicians such as Rabbi



Figure 34: ANHAD playing at a Sikh music festival in Malaysia. Photo courtesy of ANHAD.

instrumentation also accompanied by the more conventional tabla and harmonium accompaniment. I interviewed two of their band members regarding their album's intent and reception within the Sikh community.<sup>319</sup>

NK: *Has the band played in Gurdwara or do you play primarily in concert venues?*

Hargobind Singh: *We started in the Gurdwaras... We still do kirtan, we have a jetha and a band, we have both. So when we want to rock out we do the whole stage thing, otherwise we sit down in Gurdwaras and we do kirtan with acoustic guitar, vajas and tablas... We always wanted to get to this [rock band] level and we knew we couldn't do the Gurdwara thing for very long because we wanted to stay respectful to the Gurdwara protocol and our music would not have allowed us to stay within the protocol. It is not that we wanted to have disrespect, but we want to be able to rock out in Guru's name as well. And you can't really do that in the Gurdwara. We wanted to chant and clap and jump up and down when listening to us. So we moved away from the Gurdwara. We thought... let's create something that requires a new venue, that gets new kids more and more exposed [to kirtan]... This is the kind of audience we are trying to tap as well because we*

---

Shergill, Roving Sikhs, and Hargo). 3HO Sikh musicians Guru Ganesha Singh and Livtar Singh of Anglo-European descent have sung Gurbani to rock inspired tunes since the 1970s.

<sup>319</sup> Hargobind Singh and Tripart Singh, recorded interview, June 27, 2012.

*want people to be able to connect with Guru no matter what music we listen to. It shouldn't be defined by the one genre that you find in the Gurdwaras.*

ANHAD's aim is to inspire Sikh diasporic youth by providing a new embodied experience of the Bani Guru through a musical style they can relate to. Still, they do maintain a connection to normative Sikh practice, and represent their Khalsa identity by wearing full *bana* whether playing in the Gurdwara or concert environments. The ANHAD musicians find it important to respect the protocol within the "sanctified" space of the Gurdwaras while recognizing that those boundaries become blurred when taken to the concert stage.

NK: *At your concerts do you have any kind of protocol that you feel like people should follow with Gurbani chants being sung? Do people need to cover their heads? Do shoes need to be off? Anything that you feel needs to be definitely enforced?*

Hargobind Singh: *Ok, so we come from an Asian community, so how do you say, things are a little more conservative over there. So back home there is still a little bit of a regulation when it comes to that. At our last performance that was in front of about 1200 people, we kept them seated, we didn't get them to stand because the Eastern mentality is not really to accept the fact that we can dance to these things [Gurbani]. I actually didn't have this mentality when I came to Solstice<sup>320</sup> a year ago. I saw everyone dancing and I didn't really get it, but I came to understand it. In Asia we don't really have anyone who practices like that. So to see that for the first time you really get surprised.*

The ANHAD musicians have been exposed to diverse musicalities within their own Sikh families and Malaysian community and have seen a variety of embodied practices when attending 3HO Sikh Kundalini Yoga events. While these experiences inspired them to become artists who sing Gurbani to rock tunes,<sup>321</sup> they themselves had to understand where their

---

<sup>320</sup> *Summer Solstice Sadhana* is a 3HO/Sikh Dharma event held every summer in the Jemez Mountains of Espanola, New Mexico during the time of the summer solstice. It hosts yoga classes, Gurdwara services, as well as classes on Sikh and yogic philosophies and practices. During this event there are musical programs ranging from traditional Gurbani Kirtan to 3HO Kirtan and yogic chant. Due to the spectrum of Sikh and yogic practitioners, the musical programs may elicit a variety of embodied responses that may transgress normative Sikh orthopraxy.

<sup>321</sup> Two of the ANHAD band members whom I interviewed (Tripert Singh and Hargobind Singh) referenced how they were inspired to combine their love for Gurbani as well as the rock genre into their

boundaries lie in relation to singing in concert venues where they aim to elicit an embodied response.

Hargobind Singh: *We thought, you know we are already turning a lot of heads with the music... so let's break one barrier at a time.*<sup>322</sup> *But we as a band have agreed we will play based on the audience... see at Solstice we weren't particular at all. So of course we have our own systems but if the audience is comfortable with it then yes. But of course if they are taking it too far then we step in.*

NK: *What would be taking it too far?*

Hargobind Singh: *These two women at the Yogi Tea Café*<sup>323</sup> *were dancing, it was really suggestive... we definitely don't want to encourage that. We want people to be able to enjoy it, for it to be clean and fun.*

Tripert Singh, the band's drummer, adds how important it is for ANHAD to maintain the focus on the Guru even though the musical style and concert venue may transgress Sikh expectations and elicit unwarranted embodied responses.

*We don't want any sexual elements in our songs... Because we sing messages and mantras of the Guru so that is one barrier we are never going to break. At the end of the day we want to play the same role as every other Sikh. You are not supposed to connect with us, you are supposed to connect with Him. We are supposed to help you do that. So as a band we want to be able to help you do that. Yes, it is difficult because we are a band and they are coming to see you, but we want to remind people that we aren't supposed to be the ones, that it is supposed to be going straight up, so we want people to always remember we are doing this for Guru. If you are not going to do something because you are in His presence, then maybe that is what we should stick to.*

---

own musical expression through listening to the multifarious forms of 3HO Kirtan as well as Dya Singh (Australia) and their own fathers (who created the Sikh drum group *Stainless Steel* and bagpipe group *Sri Dashmesh Pipe Band*).

<sup>322</sup> Hargobind goes on to explain: “*The first was to incorporate electric guitars and drums into mantras. The second barrier was going to be the concert environment which will slowly come. Right now we are quite happy in Sikh audiences. And now we play primarily in Sikh venues, with a Sikh audience, so the covering of the heads thing, even if we don't do it, then someone else is going to do it for us. Right now that is how things work at home.*”

<sup>323</sup> Musical venue at the *Summer Solstice Sadhana* event where different musicians nightly perform diverse styles of kirtan music.

While ANHAD feels comfortable blurring boundaries within the performance of the Bani Guru in certain musical, environmental, and embodied arenas, they draw a clear distinction when it comes to the intent of their music, to connect with the Guru rather than to solely entertain. Nevertheless, concert and festival venues inevitably draw audiences of diverse backgrounds who may not be familiar with the aim of Gurbani. Because of this, ANHAD works to maintain the soteric-aesthetic intent of the Bani Guru through their performance. Interestingly, Tripert Singh's comment "if you are not going to do something in His presence" raises the question – if the goal of a Sikh is to imbibe the Guru through reciting the Bani and the *nam* within every breath - when are we not in the Guru's presence? The apparent negotiation between notions of the "sacred" and "profane" within lived Sikh practice, and in particular within the multifarious styles of Gurbani Kirtan production, question whether media technologies further blur these boundaries or deconstruct them altogether.

### 6.1.2 Technological Mediation

The accessibility to Gurbani Kirtan through a plethora of technological mediums allows the environment to be pierced with the Bani Guru whether at home, in the car, at work, while walking, exercising, meditating, or any other number of everyday activities.<sup>324</sup> In this way, technology facilitates an opening of the self towards a porous identity informed by the variegated practices, histories, and ideologies present online.<sup>325</sup> Through recording technology, past

---

<sup>324</sup> Today Gurbani Kirtan can be recorded and sold on cassettes, compact discs, video compact discs, digital video recorders, etc. It can be listened to or watched over the internet (uploaded, downloaded, streaming, live streaming), on television, heard through the radio, on stereo systems, projected through speakers, or on mobile devices such as phones, iPods, mp3 players, etc.

<sup>325</sup> Technology and musical memory can also have the converse effect of replicating a continuous identity through the continuous reliving of a past musical identity as stated by DeNora: "Such reliving, in so far as it is experienced as an identification with or of 'the past', is part of the work of producing one's self as a coherent being over time, part of producing a retrospection that is in turn a resource for projection into the future, a cuing in to how to proceed. In this sense, the past, musically conjured, is a resource for the reflexive movement from present to future, the moment-to-moment production of agency in real time." (DeNora 66)

performances of Gurbani Kirtan can be re-played in the present thus enlivening the musical environment of the past in the present moment. (DeNora 66-7)

In 2008 I created an online survey in an effort to understand the role of technology in mediating the relationship with Gurbani Kirtan.<sup>326</sup> One of the questions I asked was “How often & in what way(s) do you listen to Gurbani Kirtan? (mark those that apply)” with the following results:

	Daily	A few times a week	Once a week	Once a month	Rarely
Online through Sikh websites	31.3% (21)	19.4% (13)	13.4% (9)	13.4% (9)	25.4% (17)
Downloaded or purchased (mp3, itunes, etc)	42.2% (27)	17.2% (11)	9.4% (6)	6.3% (4)	26.6% (17)
Online through YouTube	20.6% (13)	19.0% (12)	17.5% (11)	15.9% (10)	30.2% (19)
On cd	27.7% (18)	23.1% (15)	13.8% (9)	16.9% (11)	21.5% (14)
On cassette tape	9.8% (6)	11.5% (7)	1.6% (1)	9.8% (6)	67.2% (41)
In Gurdwara	8.8% (6)	19.1% (13)	41.2% (28)	25.0% (17)	7.4% (5)

Figure 35: Results of an online survey conducted by author through SurveyMonkey.com to understand the role of technology in mediating Gurbani Kirtan.

<sup>326</sup> Although this survey was done in 2008 I do believe that it illustrates the trends that are increasingly apparent today. This survey was an initial attempt to capture the contemporary voice of the Sikh community with regards to how they experience and perceive Gurbani Kirtan and the role it plays in their lives. I posted the link to my questionnaire on various Sikh discussion groups with the understanding that in posting on these forums, I would reach mostly a young diasporic audience who had access to computers, an internet connection and whose presence on these sites already pre-disposes them to be interested in taking a survey on Gurbani Kirtan. Of the 77 respondents, most were Sikhs living in the United States, Canada and the UK, with a few from India and one from Finland. 87% of them were Punjabi while 9% were Caucasian. The majority of the respondents were in their 20s (though ages ranged from 14-56 years) with an even dispersal of male and female.

The survey illustrated that 94.1% of the 77 respondents listen to Gurbani Kirtan on a daily basis through the internet,<sup>327</sup> supporting the awareness that the internet enables “niche music genres” to reach an international audience.<sup>328</sup> (Wallis, 304) Though kirtan is most widely accessed through media technologies, 41.2% of the predominantly diasporic respondents still listen to Gurbani Kirtan in the Gurdwara on a weekly basis. Overall the survey illustrated that while the Gurdwara continues to provide a dedicated “sanctified” environment where the practitioner can focus on devotion to the Guru embodied in the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>329</sup>

The Gurbani hymns enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib instruct the Sikh practitioner to engage in the disciplined practices of remembrance (*nam simran*, *jap*, and *kirtan*) to enliven the Bani Guru as the *Living Guru* within the self and thus experience the unitary nature of Reality.<sup>330</sup> Through practices like *nam simran*, the mind-body (*man*) becomes continuously engaged with the Bani regardless of physical location, questioning whether media technology plays a similar role in facilitating embodied practice. In this way, the public Gurdwara environment and the virtual privatized realms question whether the simultaneous *detrterritorialization* and

---

<sup>327</sup> 42.2% of the respondents listen to Gurbani Kirtan daily via electronic downloads through an online distributor, followed by 31.3% who daily listen to streaming on Sikh websites, and 20.6% on YouTube.

<sup>328</sup> While the internet provides the largest access to kirtan on a consistent basis, the rapidly evolving nature of technology can be noted in the fact that that 67.2% of the respondents rarely listened to Gurbani Kirtan on cassette tapes. It would be interesting to see if these statistics would differ if the majority of my respondents were in India? Although physical media is on the rapid decline in North America and Europe, cassettes, compact discs and video compact discs are still widely sold and purchased throughout India.

<sup>329</sup> Devotion to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib includes acts which enliven the Guru within the Granth such as waking (*prakash*) and putting to sleep (*sukhasan*), dressing in robes and garlands, giving offerings (usually monetary), bowing, circumambulating, and communicating (*hukam*, *ardas*, *Gurbani Kirtan*) etc.

<sup>330</sup> “If my body were to become the paper, O Beloved, and my mind the inkpot;

And if my tongue became the pen, O Beloved, I would write, and contemplate, the Glorious Praises of the True Lord;

Blessed is that scribe, O Nanak, who writes the True Name, and enshrines it within his heart. ||8||3||” (Raag Sorath, M1. SGGS, Page 636)



*reterritorialization*<sup>331</sup> of Gurbani Kirtan transgress orthopraxic prescriptions altogether when in the “presence” of the Bani Guru.

### 6.1.3 Technologically Blurring Sacred and Profane

Daily from the Harimandir Sahib, the morning and evening Gurbani Kirtan *chaunki* sessions are streamed live via Indian cable networks<sup>332</sup> and through online video and radio channels into households around the world regardless of the dress, household activity, or



Figure 36: Gurdwara in Espanola, NM being streamed live over the internet via [Sikhnet.com/espanola](http://Sikhnet.com/espanola). Photo by author.

reverence of the viewer on the other end.<sup>333</sup> The 3HO Sikh Gurdwara in Espanola, New Mexico is streamed live every Sunday and every 6<sup>th</sup> of the month<sup>334</sup> through Sikhnet.com.<sup>335</sup> Anyone

<sup>331</sup> The OxfordDictionary.com defines deterritorialization as “the severance of social, political, or cultural practices from their native places and populations.” Where reterritorialization can be understood as the act of recouping those severed practices as one’s own. Media technologies play a particularly effective role in these coextensive processes.

<sup>332</sup> See Singh, Pashaura 2011 for a further discussion on this topic.

<sup>333</sup> The presence of a professional camera crew within the sanctum of the Harimandir Sahib causes people to mill about in hopes of being seen on camera, perhaps by their relatives watching from their couch,

around the world can choose to tune in to listen, watch, and virtually participate in the Gurdwara service.<sup>336</sup> The ability for technology to transmit the “sacred” space of a temple’s devotional service into a “non-sanctified” location begs the question, does mediatization affect the “sacredness” of the Bani Guru?

The daily *hukam* taken at Harimandir Sahib, along with the whole Guru Granth and other Sikh devotional texts in written and audio format, can now be accessed on the internet, which as we all know, contains a multitude of material that can be deemed as both “sacred” and “profane.” Gurbani hymns can also be printed from the internet for use in congregational singing, which in turn can receive the treatment accorded to most physical media, stacked somewhere gathering dust, being left in a file, on someone’s desk, on the floor, or as happens with most physical media, ending up in the trash.<sup>337</sup> Gurbani Kirtan can be sold and listened to in both the physical and virtual marketplace amongst an array of items, regardless of the surrounding environmental activity. Does the insertion of the Gurbani text into an array of locations, whether in written or audio form, necessarily introduce the Guru into the environment, thus necessitating orthopraxic prescriptions in every location? Or is it only the physical presence of the Guru Granth Sahib that requires such prescriptions? Taken another way, does the trans-spatial presence of the technologized Bani Guru, conveyed through media sources, affect its “sacredness”? Does the Bani Guru, whether in physical, virtual, or “intangible” form require the engagement and spiritual intent of an actor or receiver to enliven the Guru?

---

waiting for the chance to see someone they know on television, questioning the ego-centered rather than guru-centered focus it creates within the temple’s sanctum.

<sup>334</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> of every month the 3HO Sikh community gathers to commemorate the 1984 attack on the Harimandir Sahib and Akal Takht’s destruction.

<sup>335</sup> <http://www.sikhnet.com/espanola>

<sup>336</sup> Unlike the video cameras at work within the Harimandir Sahib, the Sikhnet feed is done from a stationary video camera mounted into the ceiling so it does not call awareness to itself or disrupt the focus on the devotion to the Guru.

<sup>337</sup> I am aware of Sikh ragis and practitioners who shred unused papers that are printed with Gurbani in the Gurmukhi script, in an effort to dissolve the inappropriateness of the “sacred” Gurbani text being thrown in the trash.

These questions can be applied to a contemporary debate raised in a recent publication of *The Sikh Review* journal questioning whether the Guru Granth Sahib should be printed within the USA due to laws requiring that those working in the printing press wear steel-toed shoes, transgressing normative codes of conduct that restrict the wearing of shoes when in the *presence* of the Guru. Similarly, inspectors will also come wearing shoes without heads covered, an issue raised by California resident, Jatinder Singh Hundal who started an online discussion asking “who is going to guarantee that a proper protocol will be followed during these inspections in order not to violate the maryada that SGPC is so worried about?” (Kaur, Sukhdeep 45) While Hundal perceives the printing of the physical Guru Granth in such an environment as potentially transgressive, in a subsequent statement he does recognize that the Guru Granth is perhaps more widely accessed by next-generation Sikhs in the virtual online realm. Hundal states: “The next generation of Sikhs do not need a hard copy [of the Guru Granth Sahib] but go online to access the Gurmukhi or translated versions.” (Kaur, Sukhdeep 46) Such statements illustrate the perceived differences between the “intangible”, virtual Bani Guru and the physical Guru Granth as well as their attendant orthopraxic prescriptions, questioning dualistic notions of “sacred” and “profane”.<sup>338</sup>

To approach the issue more holistically, perhaps we can view “the circle of sacred objects” as that which “cannot be determined, then, once and for all. Its extent varies infinitely.” (Evans, 39) Rather than being limited by dualistic notions, Gurbani Kirtan can instead be understood as a transformative methodology that has the ability to reorient the ego-centered nature of the modern ego-dominated “I think therefore I am” Cartesian subject (*manmukh*)

---

<sup>338</sup> Although Gurbani continually expresses a non-dualistic ideology, modern Sikhism has appropriated dualistic theological notions of Judeo-Christian metaphysics that separates the “sacred” from the “profane”, as defined by Durkheim’s (1951:52) statement “all known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the things...into two classes or opposed groups...profane and sacred.” (Evans, 35) Problematically, such definitions relegate the “sacred” to a stagnant origin creating a dualistic binary removed from the “profane” realms of everyday lived experience.

toward a *post-ego* (*gurmukh*)<sup>339</sup> experience that deconstructs the perceived dichotomy between the self and other, doer and done, knower and known into a heterogeneous-unity.

## 6.2 Embodiment

### 6.2.1 (Dis)Embodiment: (Dis)integrating the Self

As a soteric-aesthetic methodology, Gurbani Kirtan enables the practitioner to embody the Gurbani (Bani as Guru), constructing and reconstructing identity (Protopapas 2011) with the paradoxical goal of deconstructing ego-based identity all together. While Enlightenment ideology has brought with it secular-scientific notions that promote the ego-self as a unitary centralized knower, today scientists and cultural theorists no longer view identity as a “fixed or unitary entity-as something that is an expression of inner ‘essence’” (DeNora 62) referred to by neuroscientist Francisco Varela as the “non-unitary cognitive self.” (1999: 36f in Bhogal 2012, 862)

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio in his book *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994) also rejects the commonly perceived notion that there is one inner central knower located in the brain, often referred to as the ego. Instead he illustrates that there are multiple brain-body systems working together and informing each other that create a notion of a unitary “self.” (Damasio 227) People therefore perceive their experiences as being owned by their own *ego-self*, even though the neural basis for the notion of a unitary and continuous *self* is created by the processes that occur within the mind-body system where a human organism’s autobiography (memories of their past and planned future) as well as their body-states and emotions are simultaneously or in rapid interpolation being responded to and re-presented. (239, 242) Damasio further explains: “The source of stability [within the self] is the predominantly invariant structure and operation of the organism, and the slowly evolving elements of

---

<sup>339</sup> The notion of “post-ego” is taken from Bhogal 2012 who gives a comprehensive embodied approach to the non-dualistic ideology found within Gurbani.

autobiographical data.”<sup>340</sup> (Damasio 238) With this, Damasio differentiates the subjectivity of the nonverbal, moment-to-moment “metaself” from that of the ego-self, stating that “language may not be the source of the self, but it certainly is the source of the ‘I’ [or ego].” (243) In other words, it is through speaking that we enter the realm of language, of signification, and meaning, creating a duality between our ego-self as the “I” or “meta-self.”<sup>341</sup> (Damasio) This is where the observing self notices the distance or difference between the self, the signified, and the other. It is by removing the notion of a coherent or whole ego, through creative poetic-musical practices such as Gurbani Kirtan, which enables the recognition of a lack of Unity when the ego is present within the self, a space where creative potential arises. (Ruti 66)

Gurbani, and many shabd-reet, can be understood as deriving from the creative act that recognizes the separation of the ego-self from the non-ego other. In this way, the “singing” of the authors of Gurbani can be viewed as the product of their own experience of the death of an ego-based identity and retrieval of a non-ego based identity, integrated into a harmonious union - becoming “dead while alive.”

## **6.2.2 Embodying the Psychological Environment of Revealed Shabd-Reets**

The shabd-reet, remembered by the parampara as being “revelations” by the Gurus and other saints enshrined in the bani, are believed to carry their distinct psycho-emotive environment whether it be a state of longing, a state of celebration, a state of equipoise, etc. Ethnomusicologist DeNora expresses how musical memory can be used to recreate an aesthetic environment: “Like an article of clothing or an aroma, music is part of the material and aesthetic environment in which it was once playing, in which the past, now an artefact of memory and its constitutions, was once present.” (66-67) It is thus believed that shabd-reet can be re-

---

<sup>340</sup> Subjectivity is produced through the biological processes of the sensory and motor cortices, their association regions, and the subcortical nuclei (thalamus and basal ganglia), that continually perceive and respond to the object being represented. (Damasio 242-3)

<sup>341</sup> Noteworthy, the idea that the entrance into language defines the ego-as-self can be mirrored with Mari Ruti’s psychoanalytic approach, where the “pure self” only separates itself once it has gone into language. (2006)

experienced in future embodiments, transforming individual subjectivity. Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian elucidates his understanding of bani as a “revelation” that brings the unsayable spiritual experience into the sayable realm of language.

*There is a Kabir shabd that says when the sayable and the unsayable become one, that is Real experience, with ‘Real’ capital. So that is what we are looking at, from kirtan this is what we are looking for. From singing the articulate shabd, what it **will create in mind are the same sensories which created the bani**. The attempt is that. There is a view- amongst people who know what they are talking about {chuckles} -that the difference between the Sikh kirtan and the other religious music is that it tries **to use music for a transformation of mind**. So this is why this is the only form of worship allowed among Sikhs. (Recorded interview, Chandigarh, Feb 23, 2012.)*

The shabd-reetes are perceived as carrying with them not only their psycho-emotive environment, but also musico-historical information of that time. DeNora similarly recognizes that “a good deal of music’s affective powers come from its co-presence with other things – people, events, scenes. In some cases, music’s semiotic power – here, its emblematic capacity – comes from its conditional presence’ it was simply ‘there at that time’.” (66)

While all of the shabd-reetes give us profound musico-historical insight, 12<sup>th</sup> generation kirtaniya-ragi Bhai Kultar Singh expresses that the musical compositions transmit an experiential environment via their soteric-aesthetic nature.

*Every musical composition has got its own soul. They are not dead things. They are living things. Every musical composition is a living thing, which again brings that environment when it is played. And I am only talking about musical compositions, I am not talking about bani or the poetry part of it, I am only talking about the tune. The musical composition has got its own soul and it carries that environment in which it was originally composed. If the musical director or whoever has composed that tune, he was in a very high spiritual level, a high state of mind, that time he composed that composition - whenever that composition is played in future, it carries that environment. It is a bucket, which carries the environment with it. That is how the musical compositions are. (Singh, Bhai Kultar, recorded interview, Espanola, NM, March 4, 2007.)*

Music can be viewed as a receptacle of past experiences that can be re-embodied in the present as expressed by DeNora:

Music may thus be seen to serve as a container for the temporal structure of past circumstances. Moreover, to the extent that, first time through, a past event was constructed and came to be meaningful with reference to music, musical structures may provide a grid or grammar for the temporal structures of emotional and embodied patterns as they were originally experienced. (67-8)

With music's ability to carry its creative environment into the present, Bhai Kultar Singh elucidates how it can also be problematic when a film or entertainment tune is used in Gurbani Kirtan because it too carries that environment with it.

*Most of the filmy tunes are composed in an environment where they used to drink alcohol, and most of the songs, the themes, basically they are all romantic, certainly not spiritual topic. So the tune carries that environment with it. It is like you are carrying a bucket full of dirt, of trash, or water from the sewer, and you are mixing gurbani with that. I find it criminal. And what can we do? We can only tell people, or the ragi jethas who sing, whoever does this crime, they should point it out to them so they don't do it. But there is certainly a big amount of lack of sensitivity to that. We don't know what we are doing. We also like the shabd where we can shake our shoulders. {Bhai Kultar Singh chuckles while slightly moving his shoulders up and down} (Recorded interview, March 4, 2007.)*

### **6.2.3 Market as Patron: Habitus of Listening and Musicking**

Today progressive technology has democratized the musical sphere allowing more people to access different styles of kirtan (filmi, light classical, classical, folk, rock, world, new-age) that can be heard through cassettes, compact discs, downloads, YouTube, Sikh websites, online courses, etc. Problematically such accessibility creates musical styles that cater to a variety of public and popular tastes that are predominantly informed by mass media which has been viewed pessimistically as removing the music from a solely spiritual activity and instead bringing it into the realm of entertainment, viewed as having ego-based implications.

It has been observed that some organizations have lately mushroomed to promote popular kirtanias [musicians] and prepare their discs in order to

make money. This is against the very spirit of kirtan which is intended to offer peace and joy and not exploit the faith of Sikhs.” (Mansukhani 139)

While the ideal of Gurbani Kirtan is to be solely a devotional activity, the reality is that there have always been professional musicians whose livelihood is derived from Gurbani Kirtan. Because of this, ragis may stylize their kirtan to appeal to their audience, which today is the market as patron. Contemporary audiences have a habitus of listening informed by the modern environment, with entertainment music predominating.

Neuroscience and cognitive studies explain how subjectivity is socio-culturally informed by neural pathways that embody the memories related to each individual’s experience of being in the world. One’s disposition or habitus toward particular forms of *musicking*<sup>342</sup> (Small 1998) can be linked to neural predilections to certain musical tastes, expressions, responses, and interpretations.<sup>343</sup> Thus one’s *habitus of musicking*<sup>344</sup> can be understood as developing from embodied practices that both inform and are informed by neural networks constructed through interaction with the socio-cultural environment. (Small 131) In this way, when a particular form of musicking appeals to a group of devotional practitioners, it evokes emotions based on memory, experience, and socio-cultural conditioning which in turn strengthens social relations and becomes integrated into cultural values.

---

<sup>342</sup> Ethnomusicologist Christopher Small (1998) uses the concept of *musicking* to illustrate how music encompasses a wide range of activities including: composing, creating, writing, learning, performing, producing, listening, and remembering.

<sup>343</sup> Noteworthy, when unused those neural pathways die off forever, giving greater weight to the importance of continuous mental and physical repetition of socio-cultural-religious values for communal cohesion. (Borgo 44) Due to the lack of embodied repetition of traditional shabd-reetes within Gurbani Kirtan, the majority of the Sikh community’s habitus of listening and musicking is now informed by modern styles and interpretations.

<sup>344</sup> I use *habitus of musicking* to expand upon Judith Becker’s notion of *habitus of listening* which “underlines the interrelatedness of the perception of musical emotion and learned interactions with our surroundings.” (71) Taken from Bourdieu’s (1977) habitus refers to a disposition or predilection toward individual perception and behavior based on a variety of factors including environmental, cultural, and biological. *Habitus of musicking* therefore expresses the learned and biological factors which inform how one interacts with and responds to music.



While emotion plays a role in social cohesion and identification, it can have the negative consequence of removing people from the spiritual focus of the music by creating an “addiction” to the emotionality of the music thus causing people to confuse emotion and spirituality.<sup>345</sup> (Small 136) While motion can be an introduction to spiritual experience, the ultimate goal is for Gurbani Kirtan to take the practitioner out of their ego-positing mental activity and sensory responses by replacing them with devotion to the Divine.

#### 6.2.4 Commercializing Kirtan: Entertaining Spirituality or Spiritual Entrainment?

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> c., the modern subject has privatized “the mystical” into a marketable spirituality. Enlightenment ideology gives authority to the modern subject as a “unitary individual” further propagated through the privatization of media technology and the listening experience where “the ostensibly ‘private’ sphere of music use is part and parcel of the cultural constitution of subjectivity, part of how individuals are involved in constituting themselves as social [and aesthetic] agents.” (DeNora 46, 47)

Modernity has been ensnared within the “psychologisation” of the religious, removing the mystical from its roots in religious traditions and instead “reformulates them into privatized and custom-made spiritualities” which speaks to “consumers searching for meaning in a marketplace of religions.” (King 320) Modern ideology and technology therefore enable the production and commercialization of a *new-age spirituality* that is “oriented towards the individual self rather than religious traditions as the source of their authority,” (King 320) further closing the self off from the otherness of past practices. Thus innovative forms being sung in the Diaspora question notions of spiritualization when being sold in the physical and virtual marketplace, with their musicians gaining commercial popularity.

---

<sup>345</sup> The Hindustani concepts of *rasa* and *bhava* can be used to understand the differing notions of emotion where *rasa* can represent impersonal and detached emotion of spiritual experience whereas *bhava* is understood as a personal emotion derived from sensory experience. (Becker 2010, 136)



Figure 37: Guru Ganesha Singh (standing center) at the first concert touring with "The GuruGanesha Band", Encinitas, CA, March 15, 2012. Photo by author.

3HO Kirtan has been an extant practice since the 1970s with practitioners singing more conventional Gurbani Kirtan or its translations in multifarious styles. Recently 3HO Kirtan has become popularized through new-age commercialism within the western yoga communities and the ever-growing “kirtaan”<sup>346</sup> movement. The growing popularity of the 3HO Kirtan genre within the World Devotional Music genre causes us to heed Carrette and King’s (2005) caution against the capitalistic and individualistic agenda hidden within modern spirituality.

Guru Ganesha Singh (*Spirit Voyage* musician and founder) however believes that those kirtan artists who have found commercial success are those that come from devotional communities. In this way their music authentically represents their own devotional practice, rather than being an attempt to market individualized spirituality, and thus ultimately appeal to global “kirtaan” audiences.

*NK: So do you think that the commercialization and popularity will change the music itself, at least the spiritual focus, the intention?*

<sup>346</sup> The mispronunciation of kirtan as “kirtaan” as popularized in the western yoga communities indicates its appropriation as a devotional-cum-entertainment genre.

Guru Ganesha Singh: *No - well we don't want it to. The beautiful thing about this music is it's authentic. And if you start trying to change the music to please commerce, then it loses its authenticity (sic)... For me, my music is a manifestation of my Kundalini Yoga practice and my devotion to the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. Because even in my daily practice, everyday I do my yoga, my meditation, and I do my classical vocal riyaz, and I start singing my songs. So it is all of that, which prepares me to start singing...In fact it is the Kundalini Yoga that gives me the vitality and good health to do the 40 concerts in 60 days. That's why I think people like this music. That's why if you look at people in this genre, you know we call it the World Devotional Music genre, 'Kirtan' like Krishna Das, Deva Premal, Jai Utaal, they all have come from a certain spiritual lineage. They have Neem Karoli Baba; we have Yogi Bhaajan who brought us to the feet of the Guru; David Neetin are students of OSHO. These are the artists that are really resonating, because the music is really coming out of their spiritual practice. Yogiji really encouraged us to do the music the way it flowed through us. He never said to go to India and do it just so, he said, music is expression of the soul. Just instead of those negative lyrics we were singing about, 'I lost my baby' you know, we started using mantras and divine poetry from Kabir, Rumi, Guru Arjan, Guru Ram Das. (Recorded interview, March 15, 2012.)*

It appears that these kirtan musicians become popular not by promoting their own custom-made spirituality, but because they have an intimate personal connection to the music they are singing, as a devotional practice and not simply to please audiences. It is their spiritual practice that informs their devotional intent as is further expressed by Karan Kaur (CEO *Spirit Voyage*).

NK: *Do you find there to be a correlation between an artist's popularity and their own personal spiritual practice?*

Karan Kaur: *Yes. I've always felt that way with this kind of music. You can't pretend that this is your practice and be successful in our work. **The connection comes through in every note. People hear that authenticity and are moved by it.** It is my belief that the music that we share is a form of teaching. The musicians are teachers sharing a sacred spiritual connection with the people they touch. It's a lot of responsibility. And I think that the deeper your practice, the more successful you are. Snam always talks about how when she gets on stage, she just let's the music come through her. She is dedicated to maintaining her humility and recognize that her music is not her, it is a gift that she is blessed to share. I think that is true of all artists in our genre. (Email interview, August 28, 2012.)*

Commercial popularity does not appear to deter the 3HO Kirtan musicians' connection to the purpose of the music itself, which is ultimately a devotional activity that is claimed to allow the ego-posited action to be replaced with divine intentionality. When kirtan musicians maintain their personal practice, their kirtan renditions convey a devotional experience to the audience. Guru Ganesha Singh further states that rather than having to adapt to commercial concerns, mainstream musical tastes are evolving toward the kirtan genre:

*NK: How is it marketing spiritual music? Is there a disconnect between becoming a popular figure and being a spiritual practitioner?*

*Guru Ganesha Singh: I will tell you this story, I am doing a radio interview a couple of years ago...and they asked 'are you guys ever going to go mainstream?' ... and I said 'No, mainstream is coming to us' and you want to know, that is what is happening. You know, she [Snatam] was just in Oprah Magazine, and now people see her picture with Oprah and Oprah is saying she listens to her music every night before going to bed.<sup>347</sup> And now we are getting a tremendous amounts of hits, people are downloading the music, that you know, never even knew we existed. You know, so mainstream is coming to us. (Recorded interview, March 15, 2012.)*

3HO Kirtan musicians maintain that their musical expressions authentically convey their devotional practice. Siri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhajan continually stressed the importance of personal practice and personal expression over rigid musical orthopraxy to encourage personal gnosis. This questions whether the emphasis on personal experience, marketed to a global audience, necessarily becomes ensnared within modern spiritual commercialization. However, we do see that today more and more 3HO Sikh and Diasporic students continue to be drawn towards learning traditional Gurbani Kirtan to deepen their own practice and experience.<sup>348</sup>

---

<sup>347</sup> Snatam recounts her experience playing a private concert for Oprah's 58<sup>th</sup> birthday.  
<<http://www.sikhnet.com/news/snatam-and-oprah>>

<sup>348</sup> Today many 3HO Sikhs are interested in learning more classical forms of Gurbani Kirtan in raag. Some of the teachers of the 3HO community are Ustad Narinder Singh, Bhai Kultar Singh, Bhai Baldeep Singh, Professor Surinder Singh and Professor Paramjeet Singh.



Figure 38: Nirvair Kaur (front center) playing the taus with Sikhs from 3HO, Punjab, and diaspora who are learning traditional Gurbani Kirtan from Bhai Baldeep Singh. London, Ontario, Canada, July 12, 2010. Photo by Bhai Baldeep Singh.

### 6.2.5 Classical Gurbani Kirtan

The last quarter century has witnessed a renaissance of traditional Gurbani Kirtan within Sikh practice due to the contemporary blurring of the Gurbani Kirtan genre which mixes entertainment, spiritual expression, commercialization, media technologies, and diverse habitus of listening and musicking.

Today a new habitus of listening has been created within the 3HO and Sikh communities due to an increased trend towards learning classical Gurbani Kirtan, especially within the Diasporic youth. This renaissance in Gurbani Kirtan has exposed more people to classical styles through media technology, touring ragis, intensive workshops, and online courses. Classical training of Gurbani Kirtan teaches the importance of *chitt* (meditative focus) as one of the four pillars of Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy along with shabd (Gurbani composition), raag and taal. (Singh, Bhai Baldeep 2011) I ask Nirvair Kaur, a first-generation 3HO Sikh who has studied from the Gurbani Kirtan parampara for the last 15 year, to compare her experience singing classical Gurbani Kirtan with the 3HO Kirtan she sang in the early days.

NK: *So now that you have gone through this classical musical training that really focuses on raag and taal, how is the experience of singing that music, different for you than the music you first sang when you started in 3HO?*

Nirvair Kaur: *Well there are a couple of things, one is that it is such a complete experience... like playing the tanpura, and working out the rhythm, singing and trying to get the taal right, and pronunciation, all of these things, you don't have a chance for your mind to wander. And meditation itself is reigning in your mind and bringing your mind to rest, and being aware of the thoughts and being the master of those, and not allowing those to be the master of you, and for someone like myself, a mind that is very active, this has been a much more effective tool, or more effective methodology or practice to force the mind to stop. To bring the mind into focus at this present, this moment, this beat, and just be here, your mind cannot possibly wander when you are keeping all of those things together. At first it is kind of a mental exercise and then you just realize you have to let that go. You let that mind go. And when you have developed enough skill so that it becomes a little more natural, you can do it... it is a discipline, a discipline in mindfulness and that is an important step in meditation. When I am just chanting something simple, my mind can go anywhere and I can keep the chant going, maybe other people are able to be more mindful, but for me this has been the practice that has brought the most success in that regard. For someone like myself it has been perfect. (Recorded interview, July 10, 2012.)*

For Nirvair Kaur the practice of classical Gurbani Kirtan initially requires her all-encompassing focus, which - through dedicated practice - she is eventually able to relinquish in the meditative experience of non-ego-posed action. She notes that while simple 3HO Kirtan tunes were easy to sing along with and initially very moving because they referenced past memories and emotions, their simple musicality still allowed her mind to wander. She appreciates the intricate musicality found in traditional Gurbani Kirtan that allows her to experience the liminal meditative space between action and non-ego-posed action, expressed in neurological terms as the movement between the right and left hemispheres of the brain.<sup>349</sup>

---

<sup>349</sup> Jazz Saxophonist Evan Parker refers to his improvisation as being like “juggling” where his body begins to play but he is “not consciously controlling” his actions (Borgo 51). Repetition allows Parker to access the free spaces of improvisation, which he refers to as the liminal spaces between the right and left-brain. (Borgo 51)

Neuroscientific studies have shown how prolonged repetition of ritual action, whether auditory or visual, can stimulate the autonomic nervous system and cause the discharge of its arousal and quiescent parts. This results in a unitary experience of Oneness referred to by D'Aquili and Newberg as the "Absolute Unity of Being" (AUB).<sup>350</sup> (90) In this way musical training, while perhaps initially limiting, has the ability to engulf the ego in complex musicality, allowing the meditative space of non-ego to come forth. Traditional Gurbani Kirtan methodologies, rather than reducing innovation within the genre, can instead be viewed as entraining the ego-mind with the soteric-aesthetic intentionality of the musical expression, enabling greater possibilities for spontaneously creative expression through embodied inculcation of the Bani Guru, effectively unraveling ego-dominated subjectivity altogether.

While the parampara views four pillars (raag, taal, shabd, chitt) as necessary in the singing of Gurbani Kirtan, the 3HO perspective brings particular attention to the chitt, the mental acuity, clarity and meditative space from which to sing kirtan as enunciated through the embodied practices of yoga and movement. Of the many 3HO practitioners of Gurbani Kirtan whom I spoke with, those who have chosen to go deeply into that practice and delve into the study of raag, taal, stringed instrumentation, pronunciation, meaning etc. express the fact that they would not have been able to study such an intricately subtle musical practice without first having gained meditative skills from Kundalini Yoga. The daily 3HO *sadhana* practice of Sikh banis, yoga, and chanting mantra enables physical, mental, emotional preparedness to sing kirtan from a meditative space. Similarly, Yogi Bhajan taught his students how to learn from a teacher,

---

<sup>350</sup> Arousal is controlled by the *sympathetic system* and quiescent homeostasis is controlled by the *parasympathetic system*. A maximum discharge of the *hyperquiescent system* (through slow ritual action such as prayer or chanting) and the *hyperarousal system* (through marked continuous rhythmic activity) can cause one to *spillover* into the other, can bring about the experience of the blurring of boundaries, a loss of sense of time and a removal of the self-other dichotomy (D'Aquili and Newberg 26). Noteworthy, D'Aquili and Newberg also note that it is more difficult to consistently maintain the unitary AUB state through repetitive physical action. Physical movement can cause fatigue as well as stimulate the *amygdala*, which triggers the self-conscious awareness of one's orientation within the environment. (101) Since the *amygdala* triggers this self-reflexive, dualistic awareness of action and reaction, it inhibits the ability to maintain the AUB experience over a period of time.

how to both physically and mentally endure the patient persistence of Indian classical music training that requires a stillness of self and an ability to redirect the ego and allow the bani to be sung.<sup>351</sup> In this way it is by incorporating a habitus of musicking based on a devotional intent that becomes affective towards unitary consciousness.

## Conclusion

The history of lived Sikh practice has illustrated that the diversity of styles in which Gurbani is sung is reflective of the diversity of practitioners within the Sikh Panth. While the different musical styles may appeal to diverse practitioners' tastes and provide an initial way to experience the Bani, this does not detract from the fact that specific musical styles have historically been used for specific purposes. Entertainment music is predominantly sung in simplified musical styles that can be easily interpreted and repeated by listeners while targeting emotive responses from the audience for public popularity and commercial success. *dhrupad*, on the other hand was founded in the Vaishnava Bhakti temples, and then sung by the Gurus as an expression of spiritual realization and ego-transformation. The fact that it has been appropriated over the centuries as a classical genre sung on the concert stage does not detract from its soteric-aesthetic roots.

Gurbani Kirtan stems from the devotional soteriological practice of reciting the *nam*, both spoken and sung, to inculcate the *nam* within the self, replacing ego-dominated subjectivity for Divine Union. Originating as revealed expressions of ineffable experiences, Gurbani Kirtan developed into a devotional genre sung by Sikh practitioners and non-Sikh professional musicians for individual and communal devotion. The tradition of singing Gurbani Kirtan was maintained by knowledgeable vidwans until socio-political upheaval and shifting modes of patronage lead to a loss of memory-bearers of the Guru's Kirtan tradition.

---

<sup>351</sup> This has been expressed by many Indian teachers, including the popular Ravi Shankar who told his class "You must learn how to learn" which will allow you to understand what, how and why it is being performed.' (Slawek 16)



Colonial era reform further affected the Gurbani Kirtan sphere. To define Sikhism as a World Religion based on modern Enlightenment ideals, the SGPC as the political authorial body of the Sikhs, removed those transgressive aspects of operative practice to create a “pure” Sikh identity. With this, Gurbani Kirtan became homogenized into a “Sikh” form with the Rahit Maryada stating that now only *Sikhs* could sing Gurbani Kirtan in the sangat. Additionally, post-partition the SGPC removed rababis from Gurbani Kirtan production, particularly at the Harimandir Sahib where today only baptized Khalsa Sikhs can now perform. Thus heterogeneity inherent in the genre was replaced with a homogenous Sikh self. Socio-political changes along with the advent of media technologies, diverse musical styles, and the democratization of the musical sphere through the authority of the written word has led to the loss of knowledgeable vidwans as memory-bearers, prompting the revival of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara in modern day.

Throughout centuries of tumultuous Sikh history the Gurbani Kirtan parampara was maintained by qualified vidwans through an oral guru-shishya pedagogy. However due to the socio-political changes since the colonial era and India’s independence, the traditional modes of Gurbani Kirtan practice and its pedagogy were only remembered, practiced, and taught by a select few. The parampara has worked to preserve those historical remnants through its rigorous oral educative process that successfully maintained knowledge over centuries up until the last decade when it became near forgotten due to shifting epistemological structures.

Today there remain a few extant vintage shabd-reet compositions, some remembered as being authored by the Gurus themselves, that give clues to how Gurbani Kirtan was sung in the past and how it can evolve in modern day. By analyzing the symbiotic soteric-aesthetic nature of the shabd-reefs we see that they transmit a devotional logic to entrain a non-ego-based identity. While the shabd-reefs are important historical documents, their presence does not deny the devotional intent of differing musical expressions nor limit their diversity, but instead their symbiotic content offers a depth of insight that can be used to inform future creations not

subsumed by normative standards. Rather than attempting to replicate a self-same identity, the parampara teaches a methodology and logic to undercut an ego-based subjectivity towards one that is sovereign, heterogeneous, and able to change through time, while at the same time discerning those concepts and practices that do not fit with the transformational Sikh concepts. It is this mode of Gurbani Kirtan practice that some have attempted to revive.

Due to the continual loss of memory-bearers, a renaissance began in the 1990s. While some revivalists worked to preserve extant memory, others perceived Gurbani Kirtan in need of systematic reform so it could be institutionalized as an independent Sikh musical identity in universities and propagated throughout the vidyalas that train ragis for placement at Gurdwaras in India and the diaspora. The newly reformed Sikh musical identity harkened to the historical authority of the “music in the Guru’s way” or Gurmat Sangeet. To widely disseminate Gurmat Sangeet, reformists worked to standardize Sikh raag structures, encourage written notations, and develop a musicology of the Guru Granth Sahib through a literal interpretation that prescribed singing shabds in title raag. Unfortunately however, such standardizations and prescriptions have put past operative practices and the diversity inherent in the genre under erasure. The fundamental discrepancies amongst the revivalist approaches continue to create disagreements and ongoing debate within the contemporary renaissance of Sikh devotional music.

The ideologically polarized debate has taken the form of internet discussions, lectures in Gurdwaras and concert settings, articles in journals, personal discussions, and are often raised by Gurbani Kirtan teachers in their class discussions. Those most vocal in the debate are the Gurbani Kirtan musicians-cum-teachers at Universities, vidyalas and who teach courses throughout the diaspora and online. These Punjabi-male musician-teachers hold strong opinions about how traditional Gurbani Kirtan should be sung today. In this way, the debates thus far have been dominated by a mode of discourse that is argumentative with each person trying to

defend their perspective and approach, with their own livelihood and authority at stake.<sup>352</sup>

Rather than replicating this mode of discourse, this dissertation has attempted to illustrate the diverse perspectives within the revival, which are framed by various pedagogies, ideologies, and notions of authority. In doing so, it has also raised issues of erasure and appropriation, while also recognizing the mutual goals of reviving the traditional musicaliteis linked to their affective ability to transform ego-based identity, with the goal of offering openings toward future scholarship, practices, and dialogue.<sup>353</sup>

Moving forward, it is important for scholarship on traditional Gurbani Kirtan to acknowledge the value of past practices, to maintain semantic and historical precision, while continually reassessing what values and musical modes are indelible to the fabric of Gurbani Kirtan and what aspects are negotiable. Thus by maintaining an integrative tension and openness to research and discussion, Gurbani Kirtan can undergo the necessary process of institutionalization, can evolve with technology, and can adapt to the rich diversity of musicality and preference without erasing those memories, practices, and values which are intrinsic to the affective nature of Gurbani Kirtan. While the development of Gurmat Sangeet has allowed Gurbani Kirtan to enter the modern academic sphere and become a genre recognized and valued by the Sikh community, in so doing Gurbani Kirtan has become ensnared in the web of modern epistemology where positivistic tendencies emphasize written evidence over oral or experiential sources.

---

<sup>352</sup> In my future work I will question the absence of the feminine voice within contemporary Sikh praxis and discourse asking what its insertion would look like and do to affect the current paradigm.

<sup>353</sup> A way to approach the “debate” instead as a “dialogue” would be to take a “dialogic perspective.” In doing so, those involved would recognize the tensions within the multiple modes of discourse, to understand how people manage these tensions, while employing a suspension of one’s own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings to explore an others’. This management of tensions would allow for an interrelatedness between the self and other(s) where one maintains their own viewpoint but is, at the same time, profoundly open to the other for authentic communication. (Barge 2008) Throughout my own research I have attempted to take this “dialogic perspective,” while at the same time having to critically analyze and categorize differing viewpoints.

As Gurbani Kirtan continues to merge with modern and innovative genres and propagated through media technologies, it remains important to question whether the intent of the musical style, the musician, and/or the listener is to connect with the Akal (*Nirankari*), to please a patron (*Darbari*), or to please the audience (*Bazaari*). Making such distinctions enables us to more clearly see whether it is specific musical elements (shabd, raag, taal, instrumentation) or their symbiosis when expressed through a mode of intention(less-ness), that are affective in experiencing the Bani as *Living Guru* within the self, thus transforming subjectivity toward ethical action within everyday life.

## Appendices

### Appendix I

#### **The Facebook Debate: Discussions Surrounding Gurbani Kirtan Revival and Reform**

##### **Introductory Remarks**

On August 10<sup>th</sup> 2010 a conversation-cum-debate arose on Facebook questioning the authenticity and authority of different revivalist modes. This conversation lasted more than a month, until September 14<sup>th</sup> with a total of 230 responses within the thread. The conversation began with someone posting a question on Professor Surinder Singh's Facebook, asking about a photo posted in his photo album "Austria 09/08".<sup>354</sup> This image showed the Professor's students being taught to use hand positions as a "nada yoga technique" to learn and imbibe the note "Sa". The conversation was initially a back and forth between Bhai Baldeep Singh and Prof. Surinder Singh, but quickly became interjected by their students, supporters, dissenters and other Sikhs witnessing the dialogue and wanting to ask their own questions and express their own perspectives.

This "debate"<sup>355</sup> offers a perfect encapsulated version of the overall debate within the renaissance that has been ongoing since the 1990s questioning how, why and to what extent "traditional" or "classical" modes of Gurbani Sangeet (shabds, instrumentation, playing techniques, pedagogic techniques) can and should be revived, remembered, and practiced today. The most controversial claims within the revival seem to be centered around whether or not there remain shabd-reet compositions that were composed by the Gurus themselves. Such questions point towards the chasm between "modern" and "traditional" epistemologies, raising issues related to oral vs. written authority and authenticity, the knowledge-power dynamics of musical

---

<sup>354</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=5101240&id=651111173%EF%BB%BF>

<sup>355</sup> I label this as a "debate" because the conversation is mostly centered around each person defending their stance by putting forth opposing arguments. This debate will become a *dialogue* when the conversation instead becomes focused on resolving differences.

lineages, semantic and historic precision, reconstruction and recreation, and pedagogic modes. Interestingly, there are those who question the overall usefulness of such discussion because of their perception that Gurbani Kirtan is a “sacred” devotional music genre, inherently connected to personal expression and experience, without the need for musical training mediated by authoritative teachers.

The viral and immediately accessible nature of information and discussion, as can be witnessed through this thread, gives voice to all perspectives where personal opinion can be taken as fact without authentication or verification. Additionally, the conversation at times goes off track, turning into personal attacks and accusations, as happens with forum-style chat groups.<sup>356</sup> Because of this, I have only taken excerpts from the Facebook discussion to clearly illustrate the nature of the voices and opinions being discussed within the debate to understand what is invested in each person’s perspective, with the overall hope of clarifying the arguments and pointing towards avenues for future dialogue.

---

<sup>356</sup> A multitude of people would interject their opinions into the debate, taking the conversation into various directions, at times negative, thus muddling the main points being made. Because of this I have copied the main arguments and not the whole Facebook thread here. (See the first footnote for a link to the entire thread.)

## Surinder Singh's Photos – Austria 09/08

Photo 3 of 44 [Back to Album](#) · [Surinder's Photos](#) · [Surinder's Profile](#)

[Previous](#) [Next](#)



In this photo: Harmony Kaur, Siri Ram Kaur Khalsa (photos), Stefania Tortorelli Beant Kaur (photos), Siri Sevak Kaur Khalsa (photos), Harshdeep Walia, Nirvair Kaur Khalsa (photos), Nihal Singh (photos), Bhai Baldeep Singh (photos), Muninder Singh Sambi, Keerat Kaur, Harbhajan Kaur Khalsa (photos), Madan Gopal Singh, Sotantar S. Khalsa (photos), Harpreet

From the album:  
Austria 09/08 by Surinder Singh

[Share](#)

## Part I: Debating Gurmat Sangeet and the Gurbani Kirtan Parampara



**Amarjeet Singh**

*whats is this sign for bhai sahib ji?!*

Thursday at 8:47pm

*[Here Prof. Surinder Singh deleted his comment where he had replied that it is the Nada Yoga mudra for the foundational note "SA"]<sup>357</sup>*

<sup>357</sup> I have given my own commentary in brackets ({} ) to summarize the main points for the ease of the reader. (Within the "Facebook" debate I have added my own emphasis in bold.)



### Bhai Baldeep Singh

*But Surinder - I am student of Nada Yoga, these signs do not exist in Nada Yoga,...!  
...How can these be called Nada Yoga...?*



### Surinder Singh

*Bhai Sahib jio, Sure may be this is not from Indian N  d yoga traditions, but N  d is universal. All of us have our ways to make students get connected... this is some thing i've learned from monks and i use this in my classes.*

{While Prof. Surinder Singh stresses that he uses his own teaching methodologies, Bhai Baldeep Singh responds that anyone may teach how they want, but should be precise in labeling it accordingly.}



### Bhai Baldeep Singh

***Absolutely, you have every right to your way to connect your students...If it is Gurbani Kirtan - it has had its own tradition and discipline; if it is Nada Yoga - it has had its own tradition and conventions: **why use classical names to teach your own creation?*****  
*Academically, I am afraid, it may show one in poor light and would raise doubts about one's intentions - howsoever much positive and good they maybe, as in your case. You had told me that the monks did not use these mudras for the seven notes the way you are using either but that you had adapted these in your teachings - so I am taking this as your own creative contribution - fair enough...*

*If you want to create your own system, from your own inspiration - call it something else. ...To my knowledge, there is no Nada Yoga tradition outside India and even in India - this study was only confined to the North-Western Indian musical traditions - FYI. Nada Yoga is the rarest form of Yoga with a mere handful of people aware of its science.... Why use a name which is already taken? I know 'nada yoga' is a very catchy one and*



*attracts people but this is the most abused names in the western world - every tom-dick-harry has been claiming to be a 'Nada Yoga' exponent...*

13 minutes ago

{Prof. Surinder Singh persists that he has been taught Nada Yoga, that it is not restricted to India and that this is knowledge he has indeed learned from knowledgeable teachers and shares with his students as a way for them to embody the nada. While Prof. Surinder questions the usefulness of the conversation, Bhai Baldeep Singh however, persists upon the importance of the conversation to clarify terminologies, concepts, practices and ideologies that are inherent to the field of Gurbani Kirtan from those that are reconstructed or newly created.}



**Surinder Singh**

*Dear Bhai Sahib ji Thank you for taking the time to write to me in such detail...*

*My background of Naad Yoga did not magically appear one day, i have been in Gurushisya with great yogis and teachers of this sacred art and i would not claim to teach something that i know nothing about. I dont know much but what i do know I really do know, so i share that little knowledge with my students.*

*Naad Yoga is not restricted to India alone you will find that Naad Yoga exists across the world under many different titles and connects the soul beyond dialect and physical constraints its the only yoga which explores inner freedom and therefore the most universal. Incorporating some physical postures to strengthen focus on the source of a sur does not change neither effect the core of Indian Naad Yoga, in fact strengthens the knowledge within the student.*

*What i teach is Guru's Shabad to be understood, sung and practiced Guru's Way, developing the core of Naad Yoga is an important step in that process and every teacher does have the power to incorporate diversity and innovation within their teaching mechanism to best suit the learning needs of the students.*

*I sincerely respect your work and what you do, but there is a difference between what you do and what i do, that makes neither of us bigger or smaller just simply unique in our own areas, so **why not encourage & support each other as apposed to wasting time in such small areas when there are much bigger things that need more urgent attention.***

*Together we are stronger and can try to make a change*



*Bhai Baldeep Singh*

*Dear Surinder,*

*...nothing is more important than to discuss matters that are to do with the traditions of the guru's court.*

*...I disagree with you when you say that this Yoga form exists around the world....Mere chanting of mantras, gurbani or non-gurbani, is not Nada Yoga; in postures is not Nada Yoga - but this is how many people have packaged and sold to the innocent takers in the west over the last few decades...*

{Here Bhai Baldeep Singh clearly demonstrates his main issue with the term “Gurmat” which literally means to “practice in the Guru’s way” when there are modern interpretations being labeled as “the Guru’s way”. He insists that innovations are welcome in Gurbani Kirtan, but appropriate when created by someone already familiar with what already exists, particularly if it is going to be named as part of the “Guru’s mat”. He raises this fact with regards to the instruments being made and sold as “the Gurus’ originals” but not being informed by those extant instruments. He also questions the creation of raag forms not based on memory or operative practices. Overall he gives illustrations of the ways he feels there have been misappropriations within the revival that call for authentication.}

*And this brings me to another questions: **What do you mean by 'practiced Guru's way'? ...In the Guru Granth Sahib, no raag form is given and only raag names are. So unless one has learnt it from the Gur-Khalsa's memory banks how can one connect a student with the Guru's way? This remains my question - still unanswered...***

*And when you say, 'developing the core of Nada Yoga is an important step' I am quite intrigued and even when you say, 'every teacher does have the power to incorporate diversity and innovation'. Innovations why not! But, one needs to be well versed with that which already exists and imbibe the memory of this stream of knowledge. One cannot just take a blank book and write Nada Yoga on the front and start writing innovations.*

*A teacher does have to right to add any mode to help his/her student but then they must name it something new or else one can be accused of plagiarizing.*

*The same is the story with the instruments: being made by people who have never studied how to make them and played by people who have not the actual playing methods - these must also to be called as innovations and must have new names.*

*As I had told you already that **the history of these newer look alike starts now and that these have no relation to the instruments of the guru times except the names.***

***For example, the Saranda you play is a hybrid of 'sarangi' and 'saranda' and you play it the sarangi way.***

*I somehow fail to ignore this fact. You are welcome to continue to play it but it must not be called as anything to do with the history of guru's musical tradition.*

***Same is the case with the raag forms.** My critique to Baba Sucha Singh and Professor Tara Singh's work and subsequently, what has happened in Punjabi University in the name of Gurmat Sangeet via my dear friend Gurnam Singh Phd is based on the fact that it is just the names of the raag - whereas **their raag forms have been concocted by people who had no memory of the guru's court.** Only the names of Pandit Dilip Chandra Vedi and Bhai Avtar Singh Bhai Gurcharan Singh were used in order to legitimize this work. **I wonder when we Sikhs learn not to call our own creations and innovations as the Gurus' original.***

***...I have been troubled by factors coming in this genre and concocting newer histories and trying to legitimize themselves as messiahs of this near extinct tradition... to teach gurbani kirtan is beautiful but one must learn it before teaching others. If one chooses to teach ones own music to which Gurbani is musically set, call it ones own music - not the gurus'.***

***Any discussion and debate which brings clarity in the field we should welcome. As, there is a dearth of responsible interaction in this field. And I appreciate the fact that have you have done so. Guru-ung-sung...!***

about a minute ago

{Here Prof. Surinder Singh focuses the conversation on notions of authority, whether invested in one's teachers, lineage, experience, or in the Guru Granth Sahib. He also acknowledges that the sangat may not be interested in such discussions, which are not meant to offend, but to "convey forward the truth".}



### **Surinder Singh**

*Dear Bhai Baldeep & Others partaking in this thread,*

*...in respect of a fellow brother serving Guru, I would like to apologise to the sangat that comes across this thread as the intention is not to dishearten, offend or undermine anybody but simply to convey forward the truth.*

*I will do my utmost to respond to all of the points put forward by you all over the past day or so and hope that I will satisfy all of you.*

{Prof. Surinder Singh advocates that authority is not the property of a tradition or found in books, but lies in individual experience. Noteworthy, in this statement he contrasts knowledge acquired from books and teachers from experience, although in the next statement he authenticates his knowledge with the authority of his teachers and the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib.}

*I do not, have not and will not claim Naad Yoga or Gurmat Sangeet to be my property, it IS the art given by the Gurus and not by a 'tradition' therefore remains in the hands of Guru to share with his Sikhs. I talk not from books, not from 'tradition' but from my own experience, for me what I do is REAL and not just words. Bhai Sahib ji my teachers are not new additions to my repertoire, if you had ever bothered to ask about this I would happily have discussed this with you in the past, not that I need to prove anything to anybody but simply out of courtesy for the effort you are all putting into this thread I will happily provide this information for your peace of mind (although this is all available in my profile on my website [www.rajacademy.com](http://www.rajacademy.com)).*

*My Vidya Guru of Gurmat Sangeet, Naad Yoga, Musicology & Composition was the great Late Pandit Kharayti Lal Tahim of the Delhi Gharana, whom I studied with for 5 years under intense Guru-shishya.*

*Late Mahant Ajit Singh Ji was my teacher and inspiration who guided and introduced me to the legacy of Sikh instruments, Ayurveda and Santhiya of Gurmukhi. Late Giani Najar Singh Ji was an invaluable guide who helped me to understand the practicality of Shabad Guru and Gurmat Sangeet. Late Sardarni Dhan Kaur, my Grandmother, spiritual guide and the center of my faith. Shri Surjeet Singh Aulakh a wonderful teacher who gave me the vidya of Tanti Saaj who is from the Naamdhari community, one of the only communities who preserved the instruments and traditions of Gurmat Sangeet. I did work very closely to look into authenticity and accuracy of the resources which I was privileged to have access to in Bhaini Sahib to contribute to my research and found that most things supported my previous findings.*

*I have one sole resource for all that I share, this resource is the most accurate and reliable source that I have encountered on my journey, My Living Guru, Dhan Dhan Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.*

***My aim is simple NOT to preach, NOT to teach, but to help another to connect with Shabad Guru, through practice of living the bani and sharing whatever I have learnt through my own experiences.***

*I am sure that your next question will be about what I have experienced and that this is my own interpretation and not authentic Naad Yoga, so I will answer that question for you too.*

{Prof. Surinder Singh's perspective becomes clear when he mentions that "Naad Yoga" and Gurbani personally healed him, causing him to place authority in his own experience of the Bani. Because of this, he privileges personal experience over the knowledge gained from tradition or other sources.}

*From all of the wonderful people I been so fortunate to encounter in my life I have learnt many great lessons, they helped me to understand what Guru Nanak lived and how practical all of the Guru's were.*

***When my test came in 1989 when I lay in a coma for 4 months unable to move or communicate with the outside world, everything that I had learnt about Naad Yoga became my only lifeline. It was Naad Yoga and the inspiration of Guru Nanak that gave me back my life!***

***For you Naad Yoga is something that is written down or passed down from one family to another for me its my life, it is real because I lived it, I felt it and I feel it everyday.***

***My Guru is Guru Granth Sahib, who teaches the essence of Naad Yoga in the 5th pauni of Japji, my Guru owns my body, mind, soul and all of my knowledge of naad. Naad comes from Gurprasad not tradition, if you haven't lived it or felt it practically how can you teach it?***

{Prof. Surinder coins the term "inner-tainment" to harken to the transformative intent of Gurbani Kirtan, while contrasting it with that of entertainment, which he perceives is Bhai Baldeep Singh's intention when singing in a concert performance.}

*With all due respect to you and what you do, its important to note that we both come from two different fields, I am not an entertainer I work with inner-tainment, your stage performances appeal to many who wish to be entertained and you do your job well, but that is not my field. Gurmat Sangeet or Naad Yoga was not created with the intention to*

*entertain, the purpose was simply to balance the inner being and connect with Akaal Purkh.*

*Naad Yoga is about following the hukam of the prescription, understanding the meaning of the bani, using the correct asana's of the tongue, connecting your inner emotions with the mood specified, putting all of this together and then living it practically, that is what Naad Yoga is.*

{Prof. Surinder Singh further states that he places his authority in the “black and white” of the Guru Granth Sahib as well as in his own experience. Anything outside of this is deemed by him as “manmat” ego-thinking and not authentic. He particularly takes issue with words being “added” to Bani and singing shabds in raags other than their designated raag heading as found in the Guru Granth Sahib.}

*As much as I respect what you do, my beliefs are different to yours, for me there is no one or nothing bigger or greater than my Guru and in no instance at no cost would I ever dare to go against the hukam of my Guru, Guru Granth Sahib ji. **Whatever is written in Guru Granth Sahib is true and pure, there is no higher authority and that is what is the Guru's way to bow, surrender to the Master and obey the order...***

***The Guru's heritage is clearly written in black and white in the Guru Granth Sahib, so I ask you, 'Oh Great Custodian of the Guru's heritage where did Guru Arjan Dev Ji or Guru Gobind Singh Ji give you the authority or approval to change their bani? 'The sakhi of Guru Har Rai disowning his own 11 year olds son, Ram Rai for changing ONE word of Guru Nanak's bani sends shivers down my spine, do you not fear the same?***

***Singing Raag Asa's shabad in Adhana is NOT preserving, upholding or respecting Gurus Bani or Guru's tradition,** in fact what you do is say, 'Hey, Guru Gobind Singh you didn't know what you were doing, let me show you how it should be done!'*

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhKUYzGIaIw&p=3634981C813F01C5&playnext=1&index=4>*

*On the topic of authenticity and preservation I rest my point here!*

...

*My final topic where I will close this thread is based on our meeting... I would like to repeat my 4 unanswered questions to you... in hope to finally receive some answers:*

- 1. Who gave you, your family and your 'traditions' the authority to change the title on the shabads in Guru Granth Sahib?*
- 2. Who gave you the authority to insert additional words whilst singing the shabad taken from Guru Granth Sahib, for example, 'Vaa Vaa, Eh Jee, Haa Jee' etc?*

3. The genre you represent is *Mugale* and a replication of the *Dagar Brothers* style, *kirtan* is supposed to be *shabad pardhaan* so why is it so difficult to understand the words of the *shabad* when you sing?

4. You claim your 'lineage' to date back to the *Guru's* court then how is it that your lineage cannot decide which *parkaar* of the *raags* were rendered in the *Guru's* court, for example why are there 4 different variations of *raag Devgandhari* promoted by your 'tradition'? If your lineage were so strong then it would have been and should be very simple for you to explain what the *Guru's* used.

...

Let me clarify my opinion on your 'traditions': In this field only one of the following can exist, either *MANmat* (promoting what's fashionable or what you think) or *GURmat* (following what is clearly written in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*)...

...

*Naad* is a tool and science given by *Guru Nanak* to communicate with your inner being, *Naad Yoga* is developing a capability of that science. Different schools, different methods but the result and goal is what matters. For me, whatever is written in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is the *Guru's* way.

I simply follow and practice what was taught to me because it made sense to me and when I used it, it worked miracles that's why I practice and follow this great science. The *Sutra* of *Nanak's* *Yog of Naad* is to surrender.

I hope that my response is satisfactory to your needs.

I would request you (*Bhai Baldeep Singh ji*) to stop this battle of words, let's show the truth through our work and actions. If I am wrong in what I do let *Guru* decide, if you are wrong let's leave it in *Guru's* hands...

May the Truth Prevail and may the Fateh be to *Waheguru* alone.

*Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*

Thursday at 10:30pm

{After days of interjections into the conversation by students of Prof. Surinder Singh and Bhai Baldeep Singh and by other Sikhs, Bhai Baldeep Singh responds to Prof. Surinder Singh's questions regarding the authority and authenticity of the knowledge and practices of his "lineage". He states that his authority is derived from the operative practices of the *GurSikhs* and *rababis*, found in the extant *shabd-reet*s, transmitted over time through a pedagogic methodology. He argues that it is not bound to one family lineage, but shared by the whole Sikh tradition (even though only a few practitioners remain) with aspects even shared between

dhruwad traditions. He explains that tradition has not historically placed normative prescriptions onto compositions or raag forms, allowing for a diversity of experience and expression.}



### **Bhai Baldeep Singh**

*Regarding the questions of Surinder, sure:*

*Surinder [questions]:*

*"1) Who gave you, your family and your 'traditions' the authority to change the [raag] title on the shabads in Guru Granth Sahib?"*

*2) Who gave you the authority to insert additional words whilst singing the shabad taken from Guru Granth Sahib, for example, 'Vaa Vaa, Eh Jee, Haa Jee' etc?"*

*[BBS responds] Me: On August 15 at 1:09am from Part II/IV*

*"I used to say, 'Gurus have not written - Raag Asa Mahla Pehla or whichever way you like...!' You have taken that comment to heart quite literally..."*

*Do you actually mean to say that, Bhai Avtar Singh Bhai Gurcharan Singh, Bhai Balbir Singh, the Namdhari Guruji and his brother, the whole legacy of Gurbani Kirtanias including the rababis and Gur-Sikhs, have been totally wrong? In this remark you cut the branch you are standing on from the tree trunk. All the old masters sang in the raag forms they had learnt - and also in non-Gurbani raags, including the ones mentioned in the other Sikh granths and raagmala. I had told you already that there were a few streams of Gurbani Kirtan. As a student of Gurbani Kirtan, I have received most of these streams - and all are important and indispensable. They include the Rababis, the Gur-Sikhs, the Gur-Sikh Bibi's (women), the ascetics - nirmala, jogis and udasis and so on. If you will recall, I had sung a few examples, in France, of old compositions which 'added' words like 'vaho', 'ji' and so on; I also sang a masterpiece of Guru Ram Das, which you had appreciated very much, in which there is no added word.*

*You claimed then that the "add ons" were used by the Kirtanias because they could not bring a certain Shabad into taal: an un-musician-like assessment and absolutely not true. To prove this point, I had sung a masterpiece by Baba Farid which I learnt from the Rababi lineage in which 'vaho' is used - first singing the Shabad with the add-ons and then without. The aesthetic appeal remains, but only a person who has undergone the educative process of this genre will know and understand this...*

*... The Kirtanias who built this repertoire, with add-ons, were very fine Gur-Sikhs who contributed and sacrificed a lot over the centuries. These inclusions have to be seen as 'experiential exclamations', placed in very beautiful and appropriate spaces.*

*Whoever has learnt these compositions is perhaps in a better position to comment upon them. One must refrain from doing so on mere hearsay..."*

*Surinder [questions]:*



*“4) You claim your ‘lineage’ to date back to the Guru’s court then how is it that your lineage cannot decided which parkaar of the raags were rendered in the Guru’s court, for example why are there 4 different variations of raag Devgandhari promoted by your ‘tradition’?”*

*If your lineage were so strong then it would have been and should be very simple for you to explain what the Guru’s used.”*

*[BBS responds] Me: On August 15 at 1:09am from Part II/IV*

*“In regards to the singing of the Shabads, like the one you have linked, I also sing these in the original raags.*

*The maestros of this subject composed compositions in non-Gurbani raags for Gurbani Kirtan enthusiasts so that they might learn as many raags as needed. There were a few technical reasons... Education is not merely the learning of compositions. It is also receiving many more precious and indispensable components of Kirtanic tradition. One important reason is that unless you learn how to sing parallel raags, you cannot sing the main raag correctly. Now instead of teaching non-Gurbani texts, the great Kirtani maestros composed Gurbani in these non-Gurbani raags, which were very important to learn and sing the raags used by the Gurus.*

*If you do not learn Bageswari, you will not be able to sing other raags in Gurbani, which use its blend. If, for example, you do not learn hindol, poorbi, kafi, tilak and narayani how can you sing raags where their flavour, or rang, is used or, raags very similar to them? Likewise, even raag asa cannot be sung properly unless you know five other raags – where only one of these other five is in Gurbani.*

*In the Gurbani Kirtan pedagogy, the non-Gurbani raags are tools that allow us to sing the main raags correctly...*

*Regarding forms of raags like devgandhari – if you had asked my granduncle – he would have taught them to you. If you want to learn about it, you are welcome and I will show you the original forms. We, the students of Gurbani Kirtan used to coax teachers like my granduncles, Maharaj Bir Singh Namdhari, Tarangar Sahib into rummaging their memories asking them if they remembered any other raag form variant...”*

September 2, 2010 at 3:34pm



**Bhai Baldeep Singh**

*Surinder [questions]:*

*“3. The genre you represent is Mugale and a replication of the Dagar Brothers style, kirtan is supposed to be shabad pardhaan so why is it so difficult to understand the words of the shabad when you sing?”*

5. *If what I am doing is so wrong in your eyes, why do you not pick up a saaj and show me how to do kirtan the 'right' way?"*

*[BBS responds] Me: August 15 at 1:11am Part III/IV*

*"...the taus of Baba Sharda Singh is with me. He was the second teacher of my great-grand father, Baba Narain Singh, and my great granduncle, Baba Jwala Singh. Regarding the instruments, more accurately, it was you who had come to me - since I am actually the one who handcrafted these instruments after having traced the last remaining luthier / instrument maker (who had made instruments until 1949), Gyani Harbhajan Singh. Your Raj Musicals-made, Principal Dyal Singh-inspired, sarangi-saranda hybrid is not at all the instrument that the Gurus used to play! I have not only revived the instruments but also the playing techniques. These are taught at ANAD and students are welcome." (These instruments are technically different from the ones used by the Gurus and Kirtaniyas, and to claim otherwise is historically wrong. If you or your students want to play them - it is fine. But remember, the history of these instruments - how they were made and played - is an art and science representing centuries of experience - which Gyani Harbhajan Singh shared as simple luthiery facts!)*

*"In regard to your Dagar-Mughal lament...!*

*Actually, you are the Delhi gharana 'student' ... the seat of Mughal Darbar.*

*Dr. Sumati Mutatkar, the grand lady of Indian classical music told me upon hearing me in 1991, that I should only practice under Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Dagar and no one else. I asked why, of course. 'Your style, I see in the compositions that you just sang' (I had sung three compositions to her at her house in Asiad village), 'stylistic similarity only with the singing style of Fahim Sahib and his father Ustad Allabande Rahimuddin Dagar and not anyone else, including other dagar gharana exponents', she had said.*

*In 1995, at a private concert in Jor Bagh, New Delhi, Pitaji (Bhai Avtar Singh and his jatha then) came to listen to Ustad Fahimuddin Dagar. As he left Bhai Avtar Singh me, 'Betea (son), bas akkharaN da hee faraq e bakee koi hor ohla nahin...' ('Only the words are different,,').*

*I do not sing dagarvani style, but have practiced with Fahim Sahib for 13-14 years and we still meet and discuss some subtler issues. All my training under him used to be monitored by my granduncles."*

September 2, 2010 at 3:41pm



**Bhai Baldeep Singh**

*... In 1997, that is about 23 years ago, when I learnt that there were particular instruments played in the Guru times and that these had special place with in the 'performance' of Gurbani Kirtan. I realized that I want to sing the repertoire of the gurutimes with the musical paraphernalia of those times.*

*I went around the country begging instrument makers to make instruments such as the taus, saranda, dhrupadi or Hindustani rabab. They all said that they did not know how to make these. That is when 'bbs the luthier' was born. I mounted a major search and found the last remaining master luthier, Gyani Harbhajan Singh.*

*Alongside the making of the instruments, their playing techniques were also recovered. Though, no players were readily available. My researches led me to the only 'living' dhrupadi Rabab in the hands of, now a dear friend, Somjit Dasgupta, a student of the legendary Radhika Mohan Moitra...*

*I had brought together the Jori 'of Guru Arjan Dev' with the 'Rabab of Bhai Mardana' after a gap of more than 150 years. The Pakhawaj - Jori of Punjab had never been recorded ever. So it had made sense.*

*When I began in the late 80's, giving up my career options in aviation, I had come with a lot of adrenalin and thought that this tradition is dying and needs a savior – and that I was the one! It took me just a few months to realize that actually I had been saved.*

*People sing for others – I have learnt to sing for myself... Everybody sings the way they can. I wanted to find out how the gurus and the bhagats, in simpler words, the Gurubani authors sang. I have also, in the process, learnt how to sing my own song too – the expressions are richer than they were.*

*Call me a romantic – but I have aspired to savour gurus music – in its fullness. I am busy honing vocal and string enthusiasts – Guru willing, my wish may fructify!*

*You see, it is not the body of an instrument, or a raag-nada – its grammar, or word – it is that which is contained in them – it must come alive.*

September 4, 2010 at 4:08pm

These discussions between Prof. Surinder Singh and Bhai Baldeep Singh are mostly centered around notions of authenticity and authority informed by their own pedagogy that have given them their perspectives regarding Gurbani Kirtan orthopraxy. Since traditional orally transmitted knowledge has historically come with an authoritarian power-knowledge structure, it has caused both reformist and modern musicians to question or deny its authority, instead placing authority in the recorded form or in one's own personal experience, as can be witnessed in the following Part II of the debate.

## Part II: Debating Modern and Traditional Perspectives

After a lengthy multiple-day-long debate between Professor Surinder and Bhai Baldeep regarding Gurbani Kirtan authenticity and authority, a Sikh man interjects his perspective into the conversation, questioning the reason for such a debate when perceiving that one's personal preference and experience of the kirtan should be all that matters. And so the conversation continues...

### Rupinder Prakashbir-Singh Sandhu

*When listening to Prof. Surinder Singh or others it's simple: I'll close my eyes and if i'm feeling it then THATS all I care about....none of the above argumentative stuff on who's right and who's not. The Mind.....Keep it pure, simple and keep the negativity out! Sat Nam!!*



### Bhai Baldeep Singh

*The question, dear Rupinder Prakashbir-Singh Sandhu Ji, is not who is right and who is wrong - it is what is right and what isn't!*

*Are our interventions qualitative, responsible and ethical?*

*Are we ensuring that we are not holding the legacy of the guru's tradition and its memory to ransom - and that too for very cheap? That is the question.*

*I also care about all that I see with my eyes closed. What I see is not very heartening at all - with open or with closed eyes...!*

*But please, do not mistake, and dismiss, it as any negativity.*

Tuesday 10 August 2010 at 1030am

{After a week of continual discussion, Manbir Singh<sup>358</sup> questions the very notion that there can be “authentic compositions” from the “Gurus’ Court”, thus promoting the majority opinion held

---

<sup>358</sup> Manbir Singh is a Sikh man from Ludhiana who's wife and daughter make up the “Gurmat Gian Group”. At the time they were working to publish a CD of their own compositions “Raag Ratan: 31 Shud Raags of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji”. Their website states: “This Group is conducted by Gurpreet Kaur. She is the main force behind all the compositions and training the other members. Keerat Kaur too has composed many tunes.... Gurpreet Kaur is the conductor of this group. She teaches Gurbani

within the Sikh sangat that what is most important is personal expression of the Gurus' bani. However, he also adds that it is important to follow the raag prescription of the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>359</sup>}



**Manbir Singh**

*...If someone starts presenting his own compositions and says that it is from Guru's Court, he is just trying to make a fool of others and taking advantage of Sikh sentiments. There is just ...**No authentic compositions that can be termed as from Gurus' Court. Its just not possible. And there is absolutely no need to get into this. Any good composition by anyone which conveys the Bliss of Gurbani is from Guru's Mouth. Its not that a composition which makes Gurbani beautiful rather the Magic of Gurbani makes the composition enchanting when Guru's Blessing is there.***

***There is nothing like 'Gurus' Music'. Guru gave us Gurbani and indicated us to what Raag He thought would be right to Sing it. Music is ours we can make use of Guru's direction and put our music to the Bani.***

August 17 at 1:03pm

{The following day Bhai Baldeep Singh refers to his disagreements with Prof. Surinder Singh's claims while also responding to Manbir's prior statement that conveys the contemporary perception that there are no memory-bearers of the Gurus' "intangible" knowledge.}



**Bhai Baldeep Singh**

*Regarding the singing of compositions: This exactly has been my objection to Surinder's saying so..!*

---

Keertan/Sangeet to students of all ages. She is in charge of Gurmat Sangeet wing of Gurmat Gian Missionary College Ludhiana.” <http://gurmatgiangroup.com/about/>

<sup>359</sup> Manbir Singh is from Ludhiana, which is also the home of *Jawaddi Taksal* that serves the community, teaching music and promoting the Gurmat Sangeet prescriptions identified at their 1991-92 *Aduti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan*.

***Although he means to say is that the 'gurus have sung in this raag' but I have heard him say, 'this is how the gurus sang'. In the west, it ...has been misleading people into believing that the gurus musically sang the bani as Surinder's own composition; He has perhaps meant to say that 'the gurus played instruments such as saranda, taus, etc' but he picks up his hybrid instruments and says, 'this is the instrument which the guru played'.***

*The instrument in his hands is made by someone who never learnt their making - the playing style, the shape and size has never existed beyond the last few years. This is misleading too. Unknowingly done, I can ignore and move on; but treacherous it is when people knowingly do so. To hide these distortions and misappropriations is why the egos flare up and threats are sent across. It also reveals lack of humility and disconnect from the Gurbani's ethos.*

***I am afraid, I again find myself in disagreement with you as the music form the Guru times does exist. Sadly, there are just a few compositions left and they are marvels.***

*...It is about the raag forms - people on one hand do not have the humility to go and learn from the memory-bearers and they even dare call the elderly Kirtaniye as illiterate.*

Wednesday at 1:38am

{Manbir Singh responds to Bhai Baldeep Singh by stating that only the written, recorded, tangible word is authentic and authoritative. Further he questions the validity and value of claims to knowledge transferred through a lineage stating that they are in discord with the Sikh propagation of humility and personal non-mediated experience and expression. Noteworthy, Manbir Singh takes the claims made by memory-bearers that there remains musical knowledge from the Gurus as an attempt to equate themselves with the Gurus.



**Manbir Singh**

*Yes I agree, to say 'this is how the gurus sang' is highly objectionable.*

*If I say so:*

*It only shows that either I am a fool or I am trying to make others a fool.*

***No composition sung today can be presented as one sung by our Gurus or that it belongs to Gurus' time.***

*Because:*

***There is No Audio recordings available of Guru's period !***

***There is No written documentation of 'how gurus sang' !***

***There is no human being still living from Guru's Period !  
We have no technology to revert back to Guru's Time so as to hear our Gurus singing  
or hear the Kirtanias singing in Guru's Darbar !***

*We people are not born 'Clones' (at least not yet possible and it was not possible in Gurus time). If my great great great grandfather was a great singer and he trained his family members with All his might and they in turn passed All the knowledge to their offspring (again not Clones), still I CAN NOT claim to say 'this is how the gurus sang'*

***Memory of a human is not transferred through 'Genes'. It gets extinguished with the passing of last breath. Human memory is not a Hard Disk. Our Gurus knew it. And that is why They gave us Gurbani in Black and White. Our Gurus did not 'trust' the 'Memory of Sikhs' !! And that is why Guru ji compiled the Bani and gave us Gurbani. Our Gurus could very well imagine what would have happened with every Sikh fighting every other Sikh and trying to 'Force' his memory on the other justifying his 'Memory' as the gospel truth !!***

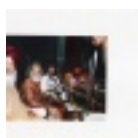
*Sikhs could not even preserve the truthfulness of many important events of Gurus Period (just 500 yrs back) and to expect that our forefathers could preserve the compositions of Gurus' period is a far cry.*

***There is no point in forcing others to believe that the why I am singing Gurbani is the only way to do it. There may be thousands of ways to connect to God. That's what our Gurus said. That's why there may be thousands of ways to Sing Gurbani.***

*When we are doing routine singing the vocal cords and our emotions are involved. But for Real Gurbani Singing we need to be humbly at Guru's Feet. At least let us not pretend a singer as good as our Gurus.*

Wednesday at 1:45am

{At this point Madan Gopal Singh, a Sikh, Sufi musician, and scholar, replies with an attempt to illustrate the worthiness of the debate and the importance in raising such questions.}



**Madan Gopal Singh**

*If I get him right, Mr. Manbir Singh seems to be proposing a rather radical, if not a delectably provocative, hypothesis. **He seems to be suggesting that tradition, as an evolutionary process, is caught up in ceaseless self-destruction. The question of 'authenticity'** is, as such, put beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. All the rest, he pronounces with touching elan, is self-promotional gibberish of the 'egoistical minds'.*

*This opens up a range of questions: **What does one lay claim to? Why is it necessary to do that? How does one become a claimant?** And what could be the possible ways in which such claims should be made? **Is it important to historicize our creative practices?***

*Or is it, as seems to be the sub-text of Mr Manbir Singh's argument, it is a futile activity as it necessarily leads us away from a direct, organic and even visceral relationship with the very grain of life? In which case all academic, intellectual pursuits become pedantic if not altogether worthless? How does each act of questioning get so callously interpreted as an act of 'one up-man-ship'? And as 'useless talk'?*

Wednesday at 2:00am

{Bhai Baldeep Singh and Madan Gopal Singh further respond to Manbir Singh by raising the importance of the "educative process" while questioning whether those who have not undergone its pedagogy are qualified to make authoritative statements on the subject.}



**Bhai Baldeep Singh**

Manbir Ji,

*Thanks for the clarification in regards to your musical learning. **From your assumptions and comments in regards to whether music can be taught, it was clear you are not at all aware of the educative processes...only he, who had never been taught in a system, can hold such a view.***

*I am an ex-aviator and I came in to this field in the late 80's when I saw a lot of Punjab's assets were near extinct. By the Grace of the Gurus, a lot has been salvaged. **Having had the fortune of learning from some of the finest elders in the field, I realized how immaculate and elaborate the educative process was. The elders devised a grammar in order to retain that which is impossible to write or record?***

***Given your non-musical background, I wonder how I can enter into a musical-musicological discussion with you...***

*Your wife and daughters have nice voices. The link you sent, I heard, are they singing in a particular raag, if I may ask..?*

Wednesday at 3:33am



**Madan Gopal Singh**

*'Educative process' (sic), whatever it may mean, is indeed rooted in an enormous secrecy. Or so it seems to me. **It demands patience. It demands a very different sense of time. It is almost self-effacing and forever hiding from people who are too clever by***



*half. It demands reflection. It demands an ability to continuously self-doubt and be reflectively involved with multiple times and plural thinking.*

*It is a very very private space and as fragile as the ecology itself. Let us all non-initiates refrain from unnecessarily encroaching upon its body and wounding it irretrievably.*

{Manbir Singh responds to the notion of the “educative process” with the common trope that heritage knowledge is not democratically accessible and that it does not have the necessary tangible evidence or recorded “proof” to authenticate such claims to knowledge.}



**Manbir Singh**

*... I never said that I am an illiterate in Music. Just for your information during the last 6-8 months I had been involved in a work concerning compositions in 31 Raags of Sri Guru Granth Sahb Ji.*

*My only submission is that ...like so many educative processes Music too is an Art that can be learned. And its no ones jagir. Thousands of people are teaching it and many thousands are learning it.*

***Like Bhai Baldeep Singh Ji, I too want to stress on this point:***

***"I wonder when we Sikhs learn not to call our own creations and innovations as the Gurus' original."***

*What is happening is that some of us are trying to fool Sikh masses and playing with their sentiments by presenting their own creations as those of Gurus and belonging to Guru's Court. These people go around the globe and keep telling innocent folks that they have a patent to the singing of Gurbani the way it was done during Guru's Time !! **They try to present their own family tradition as the tradition of Guru !***

***There is no proof what so ever regarding this...***

{While Manbir Singh finds it difficult to believe that the orally transmitted, “intangible” musical knowledge of the Gurus can be re-enunciated between generations, Bhai Baldeep Singh contends that the Sikh’s musical heritage is the tradition of the Gurus and therefore is given to the custodianship of the GurSikhs, where everyone is invited to learn, sing, and teach.}



**Bhai Baldeep Singh**

*Manbir Ji,*

*I have also said at one place, "I am afraid, I again find myself in disagreement with you as **the music from the Guru times does exist. Sadly, there are just a few compositions left and they are marvels.**"*

***There is a space for contemporary music.** For example, the link you have sent me.*

*If at all your note, "These people go around the globe and keep telling innocent folks that they have a patent to the singing of Gurbani the way it was done during Guru's Time !! They try to present their own family tradition as the tradition of Guru !", is addressed to me, I have a couple of points to make:*

***Any musical lineage can call itself a gharana after three generations of music in the family or as a student lineage. In my family we have been, apart from other things, singing for 13 now with my cousin (uncle Bhai Kultar Singh) in the 12th generation. In 1989-90, when I began to learn formally, I was told to not call our family's discipline as our 'own gharana' - instead 'this is Guru Sahib's gharana'.***

*Beyond a point, this is a practical subject, stating and counter stating beyond a point means nothing. If you are a Kirtan enthusiast, as you say, I invite you to come to Delhi sometime and I will attempt to make you sing a vintage shabad-reet from Guru-times. Then perhaps, you will see the elaborate process which allows the students to retain such "intangible" assets of the Gurus.*

*Until, you are aware of such a reality, why do you want to commit to one opinion or another?*

***If it were not possible for one generation to learn the singing from another, how is it that even the raag names can be carried forward. To follow your logic, Raags Darbari Kanra and Mian Malhar, only Mian Tansen could have sung and all other later maestros who have sung this Raag have only fooled themselves and others into believing that they were singing these raags. When most 'singers' today cannot discern and render the intonations of one raag with another.***

*This 31 raag project you are engage in: where from are you sourcing these raag forms?*

***How come your daughters and your wife sing the same composition so much alike?***

***Only the voices are different but the composition remains the same.***

***Now, that is already two generations...!***

{While Bhai Baldeep Singh authenticates his knowledge through the information contained in the vintage shabd-reet musical compositions and in the experience of learning the parampara, Manbir Singh defends the proponents of Gurmat Sangeet for the work they have done.<sup>360</sup>}



**Manbir Singh**

*... I wish to bring another point in this discussion and that is - **how can someone try to rubbish the work of people like Dr. Gurnam Singh of Punjabi University and of people like Tara Singh and by that done by Bhai Sucha Singh !! Only shows hight of Arrogance.***

Wednesday at 11:02pm



**Bhai Baldeep Singh**

*Manbir Ji,*

***If defending the traditional knowledge bearers and their proven knowledge is arrogance, versus contemporary musicians who consider themselves as more clever and wise in spite of the fact that they cannot supplement their wild assumptions and **have brought in such distortions, I am afraid I will have to live with this tag for a long time ahead. . .*****

Wednesday at 11:33pm

***I do not call anybody's work as rubbish.***

***If a person's work is contemporary I call it contemporary, etc. Every body has the right to sing the way they want.***

*You have it, Gurnam Pa' has it and Surinder and everyone has it...*

---

<sup>360</sup> The names Manbir Singh mentions are Dr. Gurnam Singh, Head of the Gurmat Sangeet Department at Punjabi University, Patiala, his teacher the late Professor Tara Singh who initiated the promotion of Gurbani Kirtan sung in Nidharat raag and Bhai Sant Sucha Singh of Jawaddi Taksal, Ludhiana (where Manbir Singh lives) and where the Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Sammelan convened and established the *Raag Nirnayak Committee* to standardize the raag forms used in Gurbani Kirtan. They also set orthopraxic standards, promoting that all Gurbani Kritan should be sung in *nidharat* (prescribed) raags, in the raag heading found in the Guru Granth Sahib. (Further discussed in the Chapter 4.)

Thursday at 12:41am

{Bhai Baldeep Singh continues to state that he has no issue with people singing Gurbani Kirtan in their own style, while also arguing that contemporary works should be named and labeled as such. Manbir Singh continues to perceive traditional knowledge as only being remembered by “One particular Family Tradition” and thus necessarily under the sole ownership and authority of that lineage, rather than being open to GurSikh practitioners and to anyone with the desire to learn.}



**Manbir Singh**

*Yes, Music is a learning process. And anyone and everyone can learn. And it need not be from 'One particular Family Tradition'. If it was so Music would have been dead long time back.*



**Bhai Baldeep Singh**

*.....The ancient systems existed in many families not many may be left now. That is a simple fact.*

*I had the fortune of being very close to community elders such as Baba Sucha Singh who would call me to attend the Raag Nirnayak Committee meetings. I was privy to almost everything that went in this field. It is in these meetings where I saw the contemporary musicians 'rubbish' the classical works and that too without quotable reference. I have been carefully reading a lot of publications from Pbi Univ. and some very sad realities and irregularities have surfaced.*

*My critique stems from all such experiences and I do not need to delve further into that here. I had spoken then (early 90's) constructively in the meetings and had prevented many distortions from creeping in as 'tradition'.*

*As long as contemporary musicians do not try to legitimize themselves by ridiculing classical works, I have never had any objection. **Nowhere in the world contemporary is equated with the traditional.** The problem with some of the people in this field is that*

***they do not realize that both, the contemporary (with all possible innovations and creativity) and the old, can thrive together and that too in a very constructive manner.***

***Sadly, it seems to me that you have clearly formed opinions - my request to you is to learn all sides of the stories first and then form one. That is, if at all you may want one.***

***...As a student and a researcher, I can and will respond... to the works - responsibly and in fairness. That does not mean that even some assessments are to be deemed as showing down or up on people.***

## **Concluding Remarks**

This Facebook thread illustrates that the revival of traditional aspects of Gurbani Kirtan has been fraught with divergent opinions, methods, and ideologies. Here we see Bhai Baldeep Singh questioning why traditional practices are being discarded and why modern interpretations are being labeled as originary, while Prof. Surinder Singh and Manbir Singh question claims to authority based on “intangible” memory rather than tangible evidence. While Bhai Baldeep Singh and Prof. Surinder Singh both place experiential authority in their roles as musicians, students, and teachers, we see that they differ in where their authority stems. Bhai Baldeep Singh’s authority stems from the operative practices of the Gurbani Kirtan parampara, which views both the Guru Granth and the Guru Panth as authoritative, while Prof. Surinder Singh’s authority stems from a literal interpretation of the Guru Granth Sahib, filtered through his personal experiences. These fundamental differences have led to their ideological rift and ensuing debates. Overall, it appears that the modern disavowal of the past as “other” has caused the parampara to defend its place within contemporary Gurbani Kirtan practice while those who have not studied the parampara pedagogy defend the authority of their own experiences and expressions, thus continuing to debate notions of orthopraxy, authority, and authenticity.

## Appendix II

### Gurbani Kirtan Shabds

#### 1) Chapter 3: Parampara, Pg. 110 Ft. nt. 161

1a) "Mori Ahan Jaye" (SGGS 830)

ਬਿਲਾਵਲੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥

Bilāval mēhlā 5.

Bilaaval, Fifth Mehl:

ਮੋਰੀ ਅਹੰ ਜਾਇ ਦਰਸਨ ਪਾਵਤ ਹੇ ॥

Morī aha'n jāe darsan pāvaṭ he.

My ego is gone; I have obtained the Blessed Vision of the Lord's Darshan.

ਰਾਚਹੁ ਨਾਥ ਹੀ ਸਹਾਈ ਸੰਤਨਾ ॥

Rāchahu nāth hī sahāī sanṭnā.

I am absorbed in my Lord and Master, the help and support of the Saints.

ਅਬ ਚਰਨ ਗਹੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Ab charan gahe. ||1|| rahāo.

Now, I hold tight to His Feet. ||1|| Pause ||

ਆਹੇ ਮਨ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਭਾਵੈ ਚਰਨਾਵੈ ਚਰਨਾਵੈ ਉਲਝਿਓ ਅਲਿ ਮਕਰੰਦ ਕਮਲ ਜਿਉ ॥

Āhe man avar na bhāvai charnāvai charnāvai uljhio al makrand kamal jio.

My mind longs for Him, and does not love any other. I am totally absorbed, in love with His Lotus Feet, like the bumble bee attached to the honey of the lotus flower.

ਅਨ ਰਸ ਨਹੀ ਚਾਹੈ ਏਕੈ ਹਰਿ ਲਾਹੈ ॥੧॥

An ras nahī chāhai ekai har lāhai. ||1||

I do not desire any other taste; I seek only the One Lord. ||1||

ਅਨ ਤੇ ਟੂਟੀਐ ਰਿਖ ਤੇ ਛੂਟੀਐ ॥

An ॥ te tūtīai rikḥ ॥ te chhūtīai.

I have broken away from the others, and I have been released from the Messenger of Death.

ਮਨ ਹਰਿ ਰਸ ਘੁਟੀਐ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਾਧੂ ਉਲਟੀਐ ॥

Man har ras gḥūtīai sang sādḥū ultīai.

O mind, drink in the subtle essence of the Lord; join the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, and turn away from the world.

ਅਨ ਨਾਹੀ ਨਾਹੀ ਰੇ ॥

An nāhī nāhī re.

There is no other, none other than the Lord.

ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਚਰਨ ਚਰਨ ਹੇ ॥੨॥੨॥੧੨੯॥

Nānak parītī chāran chāran he. || 2 || 2 || 129 ||

O Nanak, love the Feet, the Feet of the Lord. || 2 || 2 || 129 ||

1b) Notation "Mori Ahan Jaye" from *Gurbani Sangeet: Pracheen Reet Ratnavali* (pp. 503-505)

ਰਾਗ ਬਿਲਾਵਲ

503

(ਇਸ ਪੜਤਾਲ ਦੇ ਅਸਥਾਈ ਤੇ ਦੋ ਅੰਤਰੇ ਹਨ)

ਇਕਤਾਲਾ (ਅਸਥਾਈ)

+	0	2	0	3	4
			ਪ ਮ ਮੋ ਟ	ਗ — ਰੀ ਟ	ਰ ਸ ਅ ਹੋ
ਸ — ਜਾ ਟ	ਗ ਰ ਟ ਟ	ਗ ਇ ਟ	ਪ ਮ ਮੋ ਟ	ਗ — ਰੀ ਟ	ਰ ਸ ਅ ਹੋ
ਸ — ਜਾ ਟ	— — ਟ ਟ	— — ਇ ਟ	ਧ — ਦ ਰ	ਨ — ਸ ਨ	ਸ — ਪਾ ਟ
ਰ ਨ ਵ ਤ	ਸ — ਹੋ ਟ	ਰ — ਰਾ ਟ	ਗ ਮ ਚਹੁ ਨਾ	— ਪ ਟ ਬ	ਧ — ਹੀ ਟ
ਸ ਨ ਸ ਹਾ	— ਧ ਟ ਈ	ਪ — ਸੋ ਟ	ਮ ਗ ਤ ਨਾ	— ਰ ਟ ਟ	ਪ ਮ ਅ ਬ
ਗ — ਚ ਰ	ਰ ਸ ਨ ਗ	— — ਹੋ ਟ	ਪ ਮ ਮੋ ਟ	ਗ — ਰੀ ਟ	ਰ ਸ ਅ ਹੋ
ਸ ਜਾਇ					

ਅੰਤਰਾ

ਪ — ਆ ਟ	ਨ ਧ ਹੋ ਟ	ਨ — ਮ ਨ	ਸ — ਅਵ ਰੁ	— — ਨ ਭਾ	— — ਟ ਵੈ
ਧ — ਚ ਰ	ਨ — ਨਾ ਟ	ਸ — ਵੇ ਟ	ਨ — ਚ ਰ	ਧ — ਨਾ ਟ	ਪ — ਵੈ ਟ
ਪ — ਆ ਟ	ਨ ਧ ਹੋ ਟ	ਨ — ਮ ਨ	ਸ — ਅਵ ਰੁ	— — ਨ ਭਾ	— — ਟ ਵੈ



504

ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਸੰਗੀਤ ਪ੍ਰਾਚੀਨ ਰੀਤ ਰਤਨਾਵਲੀ

ਧ —	ਨ —	ਸੰ —	ਨ —	ਧ —	ਪ —
ਚ ਰ	ਨਾ ਽	ਵੈ ਽	ਚ ਰ	ਨਾ ਽	ਵੈ ਽
ਸੰ —	— ਪ	— —	ਨੁ ਧ	— ਪ	ਮ —
ਉ ਽	ਲ ਝਿਉ	਽ ਽	ਅ ਽	ਲਿ ਮ	਽ ਕ
ਗ ਰ	ਗ —	ਪ ਮ	ਗ —	ਰ ਸ	— —
ਰੈ ਽	ਦ ਽	ਕ ਮ	ਲ ਽	਽ ਽	ਜਿ ਉ
ਰ —	ਗ —	ਮ ਗ	ਪ —	ਧ ਸੰ	— ਨੁ
ਅ ਨ	ਰ ਸ	ਨ ਹੀ	ਚਾ ਽	ਹੈ ਏ	਽ ਕੈ
ਧ ਪ	ਮ ਗ	ਰ ਗ	ਪ ਮ	ਗ —	ਰ ਸ
ਹ ਽	ਰਿ ਲਾ	਽ ਹੈ	ਮੋ ਽	ਰੀ —	ਅ ਹੀ
ਸ					
ਜਾਇ					

## ਦੂਸਰਾ ਅੰਤਰਾ

ਪ —	— —	— ਧ	ਮ ਪ	ਮ ਗ	ਰ ਗ
ਅ ਽	ਨ ਤੇ	਽ ਽	ਟੂ ਽	ਟੀ ਐ	਽ ਽
ਗ —	ਰ ਗ	— ਮ	ਗ —	ਰ ਸ	— —
ਰਿ ਽	ਖ ਤੇ	਽ ਽	ਛੁ ਽	ਟੀ ਐ	਽ ਽
ਪ —	— —	— ਧ	ਮ ਪ	ਮ ਗ	ਰ ਗ
ਅ ਽	ਨ ਤੇ	਽ ਽	ਟੂ ਽	ਟੀ ਐ	਽ ਽
ਗ —	ਰ ਗ	— ਮ	ਗ —	ਰ ਸ	— —
ਰਿ ਽	ਖ ਤੇ	਽ ਽	ਛੁ ਽	ਟੀ ਐ	਽ ਽
ਪ —	ਨ ਧ	ਨ —	ਸੰ —	— —	— —
ਮ ਨ	ਹ ਰਿ	ਰ ਸ	ਘੁ ਽	ਟੀ ਐ	਽ ਽
ਪ —	ਨ ਧ	ਨ —	ਸੰ —	— —	— —
ਮ ਨ	ਹ ਰਿ	ਰ ਸ	ਘੁ ਽	ਟੀ ਐ	਽ ਽

ਰਾਗ ਬਿਲਾਵਲ

505

ਧ —	ਨ ਸੰ	— —	ਨ —	ਧ ਪ	— —
ਸੰ ਽	ਗਿ ਸਾ	਽ ਧੂ	ਉ ਲ	ਟੀ ਐ	਽ ਽
ਸੰ —	ਨੁ —	ਧ —	— —	ਪ ਮ	— ਗ
ਅ ਨ	ਨਾ ਽	ਹੀ ਽	ਨਾ ਽	ਹੀ ਽	ਕੇ ਽
ਗ ਰ	ਗ —	ਪ੍ਰੀ ਮ	ਧ ਪ	— ਮ	— ਗ
ਨਾ ਽	ਨ ਕ	਽ ਽	ਤਿ ਽	ਚ ਰ	ਨ ਽
ਮ ਗ	ਰ ਸ	— —	ਪ ਮ	ਗ —	ਰ ਸ
ਚ ਰ	ਨ ਽	ਹੇ ਽	ਮੋ ਽	ਰੀ ਽	ਅ ਹੀ
ਸ					
ਜਾਇ					

## 2) Chapter 3: Parampara, pg 124 ft nt 177

2a) “Ghar meh thakur” (SGGS 739)

ਸੂਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥

Sūhī mehlā 5.

Soohee, Fifth Mehl:

ਘਰ ਮਹਿ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਨਦਰਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ॥

Ghar meh thākur naḍar na āvai.

Within the home of his own self, he does not even come to see his Lord and Master.

ਗਲ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਹਣੁ ਲੈ ਲਟਕਾਵੈ ॥੧॥

Gal meh pāhaṇ lai latkāvai. ||1||

And yet, around his neck, he hangs a stone god. ||1||

ਭਰਮੇ ਭੂਲਾ ਸਾਕਤੁ ਫਿਰਤਾ ॥

Bharme bhūlā sākaṭ firṭā.

The faithless cynic wanders around, deluded by doubt.

ਨੀਰੁ ਬਿਰੋਲੈ ਖਪਿ ਖਪਿ ਮਰਤਾ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Nīr birolai khap khap marṭā. ||1|| rahāo.

He churns water, and after wasting his life away, he dies. ||1||Pause||

ਜਿਸੁ ਪਾਹਣੁ ਕਉ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਕਹਤਾ ॥

Jis pāhaṇ kao thākur kaṭā.

That stone, which he calls his god,

ਓਹੁ ਪਾਹਣੁ ਲੈ ਉਸ ਕਉ ਡੁਬਤਾ ॥੨॥

Oh pāhaṇ lai us kao dubṭā. ||2||

that stone pulls him down and drowns him. ||2||

ਗੁਨਹਗਾਰ ਲੂਣ ਹਰਾਮੀ ॥

Gunahgār lūṇ harāmī.

O sinner, you are untrue to your own self;

ਪਾਹਣ ਨਾਵ ਨ ਪਾਰਗਿਰਾਮੀ ॥੩॥

Pāhaṇ nāv na pārgiramī. ||3||

a boat of stone will not carry you across. ||3||

ਗੁਰ ਮਿਲ ਨਾਨਕ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਜਾਤਾ ॥

Gur mil Nānak ṭhākur jāṭā.

Meeting the Guru, O Nanak, I know my Lord and Master.

ਜਲਿ ਥਲਿ ਮਹੀਅਲਿ ਪੂਰਨ ਬਿਧਾਤਾ ॥੪॥੩॥੯॥

Jal thal mahīal pūran biḍhātā. ||4||3||9||

The Perfect Architect of Destiny is pervading and permeating the water, the land and the sky. ||4||3||9||

2b) Notation for "Ghar meh thakur" from *Gurbani Sangeet: Pracheen Reet Ratnavali* (pg 473)

ਰਾਗ ਸੂਹੀ ਆਸਾ

473

**ਤਿੰਨਤਾਲ (ਅਸਥਾਈ)**

+	2	0	3
ਸ — — — ਘ ਰ ਮ ਹਿ	ਪ — ਧ ਨੁ ਠਾ ਟ ਕ ਰੁ	ਧ — ਪ — ਨ ਟ ਦ ਟ	ਰ ਗ — ਰ ਟ ਰਿ ਟ ਨ
ਸ — — — ਆ ਟ ਵੈ ਟ	ਪ — ਧ ਨੁ ਠਾ ਟ ਕੁ ਰੁ	ਧ — ਪ — ਨ ਟ ਦ ਟ	ਰ ਗ — ਰ ਟ ਰਿ ਟ ਨ
ਸ — — — ਆ ਟ ਵੈ ਟ	— — — — ਟ ਟ ਟ ਟ	ਧ — — — ਗ ਲ ਮ ਹਿ	— — — ਨ ਪਾ ਟ ਹ ਟੁ
ਰੰ ਸੰ — — ਨ ਲੈ ਟ ਲ ਟ	ਧ ਨ ਪ — ਕਾ ਟ ਵੈ ਟ	— ਧ — — ਟ ਗ ਲ ਮਹਿ	— — — ਨ ਪਾ ਟ ਹ ਟੁ
ਸੰ — — ਨ ਲੈ ਟ ਲ ਟ	ਧ ਨ ਪ — ਕਾ ਟ ਵੈ ਟ	— — — — ਨ ਟ ਦ ਟ	ਰ ਗ — ਰ ਟ ਰਿ ਟ ਨ
ਸ — — — ਆ ਟ ਵੈ ਟ	ਪ — ਧ ਨੁ ਠਾ ਟ ਕੁ ਰੁ	ਧ — ਪ — ਨ ਟ ਦ ਟ	ਰ ਗ — ਰ ਟ ਰਿ ਟ ਨ
ਸ ਆਵੈ			

### 3) Chapter 3: Parampara, pg. 126 Ft nt. 178

3a) “Dheero Dekh Tumare Ranga” (SGGS 824)

ਬਿਲਾਵਲੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥

Bilāval mehlā 5.

Bilaaval, Fifth Mehl:

ਧੀਰਉ ਦੇਖਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੇ ਰੰਗਾ ॥

Dhīrao dekh̐ tumhārai rangā.

I am reassured, gazing upon Your wondrous play.

ਤੁਹੀ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀ ਤੁਹੀ ਵਸਹਿ ਸਾਧ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਾ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Tuhī suāmī anṭarjāmī tūhī vasēh sād̐h̐ kai sangā. ||1|| rahāo.

You are my Lord and Master, the Inner-knower, the Searcher of hearts; You dwell with the Holy Saints. ||1||Pause||

ਖਿਨ ਮਹਿ ਥਾਪ ਨਿਵਾਜੇ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਨੀਚ ਕੀਟ ਤੇ ਕਰਹਿ ਰਾਜੰਗਾ ॥੧॥

Khin meh̐ thāp nivāje thākur nīch̐ kīt̐ te karahi rājangā. ||1||

In an instant, our Lord and Master establishes and exalts. From a lowly worm, He creates a king. ||1||

ਕਬਹੂ ਨ ਬਿਸਰੈ ਹੀਏ ਮੋਰੇ ਤੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸ ਇਹੀ ਦਾਨੁ ਮੰਗਾ ॥੨॥੧੫॥੧੦੧॥

Kabhū na bisrai hīe more te Nānak dās ihī dān mangā. ||2||15||101||

May I never forget You from my heart; slave Nanak prays for this blessing.

||2||15||101||

## 3b) Notation for “Dheero Dekh Tumare Ranga”

## Asthai

X		0		2		0		3		4	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
									GR	D	P
									Dhe	e-	ro
MG	M	G	MG	PM	M	G	-M	R	S	--	--
De	--	--	kh	--	tu	Ma	--	--	re	--	--
D	--	--	P	--	(M	G	M	R)			
Ran	--	--	ga		(mai	Va	--	Ri)			

## Antra

X		0		2		0		3		4	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
						P	--	P	N	-D	-N
						Khi	n	Meh	tha	-p	-ni
S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	D	SN	SN	R
Va	--	je	tha	Ku	r	Ni	--	Ch	ki	T	te
SN	SN	S	D	P	(M	G	M	R)			
Ka	reh	Ra	jan	Ga	(mai	Va	--	Ri)			

## Abhog

X		0		2		0		3		4	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
						P	--	P	N	D	N
						kaba	hu	na	vi	sa	re
S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	D	SN	SN	R S
Hi	e	Mo	re	--	te	Na	na	K	da	--	s eh
SN	SN	SS	D	P	(M	G	M	R)			
Hi	da	-n	man	Ga	(mai	Va	--	Ri)			

#### 4) Chapter 5: Debating Orthopraxy, pg. 204 Ft nt. 264

4a) Gurbani for Bhai Santa Singh, Audio Example I, (SGGS 411)

ੴ ਸਿਤਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

Ikoa'nkār satgur parsād.

One Universal Creator God. By The Grace Of The True Guru:

ਰਾਗੁ ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੯ ॥

Rāg āsā mehlā 9.

Raag Aasaa, Ninth Mehl:

ਬਿਰਥਾ ਕਹਉ ਕਉਨ ਸਿਉ ਮਨ ਕੀ ॥

Birthā kahao kaun sio man kī.

Who should I tell the condition of the mind?

ਲੋਭਿ ਗ੍ਰਸਿਓ ਦਸ ਹੂ ਦਿਸ ਧਾਵਤ ਆਸਾ ਲਾਗਿਓ ਧਨ ਕੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Lobh garsio das hū dis dhāvaṭ āsā lāgio dhan kī. ||1|| rahāo.

Engrossed in greed, running around in the ten directions, you hold to your hopes of wealth. ||1||Pause||

ਸੁਖ ਕੈ ਹੇਤਿ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਪਾਵਤ ਸੇਵ ਕਰਤ ਜਨ ਜਨ ਕੀ ॥

Sukh kai het bahut dukh pāvaṭ sev karat jan jan kī.

For the sake of pleasure, you suffer such great pain, and you have to serve each and every person.

ਦੁਆਰਹਿ ਦੁਆਰਿ ਸੁਆਨ ਜਿਉ ਡੋਲਤ ਨਹ ਸੁਧ ਰਾਮ ਭਜਨ ਕੀ ॥੧॥

Duāreh dūār suān jio dolaṭ nah sudh rām bhajan kī. ||1||

You wander from door to door like a dog, unconscious of the Lord's meditation. ||1||

ਮਾਨਸ ਜਨਮ ਅਕਾਰਥ ਖੋਵਤ ਲਾਜ ਨ ਲੋਕ ਹਸਨ ਕੀ ॥

Mānas janam akārath khovaṭ lāj na lok hasan kī.

You lose this human life in vain, and You are not even ashamed when others laugh at you.

ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਕਿਉ ਨਹੀ ਗਾਵਤ ਕੁਮਿਤ ਬਿਨਾਸੈ ਤਨ ਕੀ ॥੨॥੧॥੨੩੩॥

Nānak har jas kio nahī gāvaṭ kumaṭ bināsai ṭan kī. ||2||1||233||

O Nanak, why not sing the Lord's Praises, so that you may be rid of the body's evil disposition? ||2||1||233||

4b) Gurbani for Bhai Santa Singh, Audio Example II, (SGGS 345-346)

ੴ ਸਿਤਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

Ikoa'nkār saṭgur parsād.

One Universal Creator God. By The Grace Of The True Guru:

ਗਉੜੀ ਬੈਰਾਗਣਿ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀਉ ॥

Gaoṛī bairāgaṇ Ravidās jīo.

Gauree Bairaagan, Ravi Daas Jee:

ਘਟ ਅਵਘਟ ਡੂਗਰ ਘਣਾ ਇਕੁ ਨਿਰਗੁਣੁ ਬੈਲੁ ਹਮਾਰ ॥

Gḥat avghat dūgar gḥaṇā ik nirgunḥ bail hamār.

The path to God is very treacherous and mountainous, all I have is this worthless ox.

ਰਮਈਏ ਸਿਉ ਇਕ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਪੁੰਜੀ ਰਾਖੁ ਮੁਰਾਰਿ ॥੧॥

Ramīe sio ik benṭī merī pūnjī rākḥ murār. ||1||

I offer this one prayer to the Lord, to preserve my capital. ||1||

ਕੋ ਬਨਜਾਰੋ ਰਾਮ ਕੋ ਮੇਰਾ ਟਾਂਡਾ ਲਾਇਆ ਜਾਇ ਰੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Ko banjāro rām ko merā tāṇḍā lāiā jāe re. ||1|| rahāo.

Is there any merchant of the Lord to join me? My cargo is loaded, and now I am leaving.

||1||Pause||

ਹਉ ਬਨਜਾਰੋ ਰਾਮ ਕੋ ਸਹਜ ਕਰਉ ਬਾਪਾਰੁ ॥

Hao banjāro rām ko sahj karao bayāpār.

I am the merchant of the Lord; I deal in spiritual wisdom.

ਮੈ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਧਨੁ ਲਾਇਆ ਬਿਖੁ ਲਾਦੀ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥੨॥



Mai rām nām dhan lāḍiā bikḥ lāḍī sansār. ||2||

I have loaded the Wealth of the Lord's Name; the world has loaded poison. ||2||

ਉਰਵਾਰ ਪਾਰ ਕੇ ਦਾਨੀਆ ਲਖਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਆਲ ਪਤਾਲੁ ॥

Urvār pār ke ḍāniā likḥ leho āl paṭāl.

O you who know this world and the world beyond: write whatever nonsense you please about me.

ਮੋਹਿ ਜਮ ਡੰਡੁ ਨ ਲਾਗਈ ਤਜੀਲੇ ਸਰਬ ਜੰਜਾਲ ॥੩॥

Mohi jam dand na lāgī tajīle sarab janjāl. ||3||

The club of the Messenger of Death shall not strike me, since I have cast off all entanglements. ||3||

ਜੈਸਾ ਰੰਗੁ ਕਸੁੰਭ ਕਾ ਤੈਸਾ ਇਹੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥

Jaisā rang kasumbḥ kā taisā ih sansār.

Love of this world is like the pale, temporary color of the safflower.

ਮੇਰੇ ਰਮਈਏ ਰੰਗੁ ਮਜੀਠ ਕਾ ਕਹੁ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਚਮਾਰ ॥੪॥੧॥

Mere ramīe rang majīṭh kā kaho Ravidās ḥamār. ||4||1||

The color of my Lord's Love, however, is permanent, like the dye of the madder plant. So says Ravi Daas, the tanner. ||4||1||

4c) Gurbani for Bhai Santa Singh, Audio Example III, (SGGS 459)

ਛੰਤੁ ॥

Chḥant.

Chhant:

ਭਿਨੀ ਰੈਨੜੀਐ ਚਾਮਕਨਿ ਤਾਰੇ ॥

Bhinnī rainṛīai ḥāmkan tāre.

The night is wet with dew, and the stars twinkle in the heavens.

ਜਾਗਹਿ ਸੰਤ ਜਨਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਰਾਮ ਪਿਆਰੇ ॥

Jāgēh sant̃ janā mere rām piāre.

The Saints remain wakeful; they are the Beloveds of my Lord.

ਰਾਮ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਸਦਾ ਜਾਗਹਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਸਿਮਰਹਿ ਅਨਦਿਨੋ ॥

Rām piāre saḍā jāgēh nām simrahi anḍino.

The Beloveds of the Lord remain ever wakeful, remembering the Naam, the Name of the Lord, day and night.

ਚਰਣ ਕਮਲ ਪਿਆਨੁ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਬਿਸਰੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਇਕੁ ਖਿਨੋ ॥

Charaṇ kamal ḍhiān hirḍai parabḥ bisar nāhī ik khino.

In their hearts, they meditate on the lotus feet of God; they do not forget Him, even for an instant.

ਤਜਿ ਮਾਨੁ ਮੋਹੁ ਬਿਕਾਰੁ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਕਲਮਲਾ ਦੁਖ ਜਾਰੇ ॥

Taj mān moh bikār man kā kalmalā ḍukḥ jāre.

They renounce their pride, emotional attachment and mental corruption, and burn away the pain of wickedness.

ਬਿਨਵੰਤਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਦਾ ਜਾਗਹਿ ਹਰਿ ਦਾਸ ਸੰਤ ਪਿਆਰੇ ॥੧॥

Binvant̃ Nānak saḍā jāgēh har ḍās sant̃ piāre. ||1||

Prays Nanak, the Saints, the beloved servants of the Lord, remain ever wakeful. ||1||

ਮੇਰੀ ਸੇਜੜੀਐ ਆਡੰਬਰੁ ਬਣਿਆ ॥

Merī sejṛīai ādambar baṇiā.

My bed is adorned in splendor.

4d) Gurbani for Bhai Samund Singh, Audio Example IV, (SGGS 9-10)

ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ॥

Āsā mehlā 1.

Aasaa, First Mehl:

ਆਖਾ ਜੀਵਾ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਉ ॥

Ākhā jīvā visrai mar jāo.

Chanting it, I live; forgetting it, I die.

ਆਖਣਿ ਅਉਖਾ ਸਾਚਾ ਨਾਉ ॥

Ākhaṇ aukhā sāchā nāo.

It is so difficult to chant the True Name.

ਸਾਚੇ ਨਾਮ ਕੀ ਲਾਗੈ ਭੂਖ ॥

Sāche nām kī lāgai bhūkh.

If someone feels hunger for the True Name,

ਉਤੁ ਭੂਖੈ ਖਾਇ ਚਲੀਅਹਿ ਦੁਖ ॥੧॥

Uṭ bhūkhai khāe chāliahī dūkh. ||1||

That hunger shall consume his pain. ||1||

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮੇਰੀ ਮਾਇ ॥

So kio visrai merī māe.

How can I forget Him, O my mother?

ਸਾਚਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਸਾਚੈ ਨਾਇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Sāchā sāhib sāchāi nāe. ||1|| rahāo.

True is the Master, True is His Name. ||1||Pause||

ਸਾਚੇ ਨਾਮ ਕੀ ਤਿਲੁ ਵਿਡਾਈ ॥

Sāche nām kī ṭil vadiāi.

Trying to describe even an iota of the Greatness of the True Name,

ਆਖਿ ਥਕੇ ਕੀਮਤਿ ਨਹੀ ਪਾਈ ॥

Ākh̥ thake kīmat̥ nahī pāi.

People have grown weary, but they have not been able to evaluate it.

ਜੇ ਸਭਿ ਮਿਲ ਕੈ ਆਖਣ ਪਾਹਿ ॥

Je sabh̥ mil kai ākh̥aṇ pāhi.

Even if everyone were to gather together and speak of Him,

ਵਡਾ ਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਘਾਟਿ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥੨॥

vadā na hovai ghāt na jāi. ||2||

He would not become any greater or any lesser. ||2||

ਨਾ ਓਹੁ ਮਰੈ ਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਸੋਗੁ ॥

Nā oh marai na hovai sog.

That Lord does not die; there is no reason to mourn.

ਦੇਦਾ ਰਹੈ ਨ ਚੁਕੈ ਭੋਗੁ ॥

Dedā rahai na chūkai bhog.

He continues to give, and His Provisions never run short.

ਗੁਣੁ ਏਹੋ ਹੋਰੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥

Guṇ̥ eho hor nāhī koe.

This Virtue is His alone; there is no other like Him.

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਹੋਆ ਨਾ ਕੋ ਹੋਇ ॥੩॥

Nā ko hoā nā ko hoe. ||3||

There never has been, and there never will be. ||3||

ਜੇਵਡੁ ਆਪਿ ਤੇਵਡ ਤੇਰੀ ਦਾਤਿ ॥

Jevad āp̥ tevad̥ terī dāt̥.

As Great as You Yourself are, O Lord, so Great are Your Gifts

## Appendix III

### Interviews and Acknowledgements

#### **Primary Interviews:**

Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi  
 Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian  
 Bhai Balbir Singh (Hazoori Ragi)  
 Bhai Baldeep Singh  
 Bhai Gurcharan Singh  
 Bhai Hari Singh (Hazoori Ragi)  
 Bhai Harjot Singh Zakhmi  
 Bhai Kultar Singh  
 Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi (Hazoori Ragi)  
 Bhai Swaran Singh  
 Bhayee Sikander Singh Bagrian  
 Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal  
 Dr. B.S. Rattan  
 Dr. Francesca Cassio  
 Dr. Gurnam Singh (Punjabi University, Patiala)  
 Dr. Jagir Singh (Punjabi University, Patiala)  
 Gyani Darshan Singh Sohal and son, Harijit Singh Sohal  
 Pandit Surinder Singh Bandhu  
 Pandit Tejpal Singh Bandhu  
 Principal Dyal Singh (Gurmat Academy, New Delhi)  
 Principal Sukhwant Singh (Jawaddi Taksal)  
 Professor Alankar Singh (Punjabi University, Patiala)  
 Professor Kartar Singh (Gurmat Sangeet Vidyala, Anandpur Sahib)  
 Professor Nivedita Kaur (Punjabi University, Patiala)  
 Professor S.K. Saxena  
 Professor Surinder Singh (Raj Academy, UK)  
 Sant Narinder Singh (Hazoori Ragi)  
 Ustad Balwant Singh Namdhari  
 Ustad Gurdev Singh Namdhari  
 Ustad Harbhajan Singh Namdhari  
 Ustad Narinder Singh (Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar)

#### **Student Interviews:**

Bhai Baldeep Singh's Students:
 

- Harbhajan Kaur Khalsa

- Harkamal Singh
- Harshdeep Singh
- Keerat Kaur
- Kulmeet Singh
- Manjit Kaur
- Nihal Singh
- Nirvair Kaur Khalsa
- Parminder Singh Bhamra
- Sat Kartar Kaur Khalsa
- Sat Kirtan Kaur Khalsa
- Siri Sevak Kaur Khalsa

Ustad Narinder Singh's Students:

- Chardi Kala Jetha
- Niringan Kaur Khalsa (Spirit Voyage)

Paramjeet Singh (Toronto) Students:

- Snatam Kaur Khalsa
- Guru Ganesha Singh Khalsa

Bhai Hari Singh's Students:

- Prabhu Nam Kaur Khalsa
- Snatam Kaur Khalsa

Dr. Gurnam Singh:

- Students at the Gurmat Sangeet Department

Principal Sukhwant Singh:

- Students at Jawaddi taksal

Professor Kartar Singh:

- Students at Gurmat Sangeet Academy (Anandpur Sahib)

Principal Dyal Singh:

- Students at Gurmat Academy (Delhi, Rakab ganj)

### **The 3HO/Sikh Dharma Interviews:**

(Some mentioned above in the Student section)

Antion Vikram Singh Khalsa

Guru Ganesha Singh Khalsa

Gurunam Singh Khalsa

Harbhajan Kaur Khalsa

Jai Jagdeesh Kaur Khalsa

Karan Karan Kaur Khalsa

Livtar Singh Khalsa

Niringan Kaur Khalsa

Nirvair Kaur Khalsa

Rami Katz (Aka) Ram Das Kaur Khalsa

Sat Kartar Kaur Khalsa

Sat Kirin Kaur Khalsa

Sat Kirtan Kaur Khalsa  
Siri Sevak Kaur Khalsa  
Snatam Kaur Khalsa

**Diaspora Interviews:**

Hargobind Singh (the ANHAD band, Malaysia)  
Tripart Singh (the ANHAD band, Malaysia)

**Acknowledging:**

**Those whom I had the blessing of learning from and have since passed:**

Bhai Avtar Singh (1925-2006)  
Maharaj Thakur Singh “Hazoor Pitaji” (May 14, 1939 -Aug 26, 2006)  
Pandit Panna Lal Upadhyay (Aug 15, 1948 –Jan 5, 2011)

**Those whom I have continued to learn from:**

Bhai Baldeep Singh (13<sup>th</sup> generation exponent)  
Bhai Gurcharan Singh (11<sup>th</sup> generation exponent, b. 1914)  
Bhai Kultar Singh (12<sup>th</sup> generation exponent)

**Those whom I have interviewed and have since passed:**

Principal Dyal Singh (1934- Feb 2012)  
Dr. Ajit Singh Paintal (1936-Jan 27, 2012)  
Professor S.K. Saxena (b. 1920-d. April 6, 2013)  
Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi (d. Nov 10, 2013)

**Those whom I never had the opportunity of interviewing:**

Maharaj Bir Singh Namdhari (1920-2012)  
Bibi Jasbir Kaur Khalsa (1947-2011)  
Bibi Jaswant Kaur (Jan 20, 1920-March 25, 2010)

## Bibliography

Abul-Fazl-Allami. 1907. *Ain-I-Akbari*. (Engl. trans. by Jarrett H.S.) Vol III. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal. In Cassio, Francesca. 2013 (May 10-12). "Gurbani Sangit: Authenticity and Influences, A Study of the Sikh Gurus' tradition in relation to other genres of Indian music." University of Riverside's Third Sikh Studies Conference: *Dialogues with/in Sikh Studies: Texts, Practices and Performances*. Unpublished.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Verso.

Bakhle, Janaki. 2005. *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barge, J. Kevin. 2008. "Dialogic Perspectives." *International Encyclopedia of Communications*. <http://www.communicationencyclopedia.com>

Bataille, Georges. 2001. *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*. "Nonknowledge, Laughter, and Tears" (Feb 9, 1953) ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 133-152.

Becker, Judith. 2004. *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

----- 2010. "Exploring the Habitus of Listening." *Handbook of Music and Emotion*. Juslin, Patrik N. and John A. Sloboda. New York: Oxford University Press. 127-157.

Bell, Catherine. 1997. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1999. "THE TASK OF THE TRANSLATOR: An introduction to the translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*," trans, Harry Zohn, Lawrence Venuti ed. *Translation Studies Reader*, USA: Routledge.

Bhatkhande, Vishnu Narayana. 1990. *Hindusthani Sangeet Paddhati Kramik Pustak Malika*. 6 vols. Allahbad: Sangit Sadan Prakashan (first published in Marathi in 6 vols. 1910–1932).

-----1974. [1934]. *A Short History of the Music of Upper India*. Bombay, India. (repr. 1993 *Hindustani Sangeet - Paddhati (Vol 1 - 4): Kramik Pustak Malika*. Hatras: Sangeet Karyalaya). Baroda: Indian Musicological Society.



Bhogal, Balbinder Singh. 2011. "The Hermeneutics of Sikh Music (rag) and Word (shabad)." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 7 (3): 211-244.

----- December. 2012. "The Animal Sublime: Rethinking the Sikh Mystical Body." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Atlanta, Georgia: Oxford University Press. 80 (4): 856-908.

Bohlman, Philip. 1997. "Returning to the Ethnomusicological Past." *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. ed. Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, 246-271. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bor, Joep. 2006. "Three Important Essays on Hindustani Music," *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society*. 36-37: 5-14.

Borgo, David. 2005. *Sync or Swarm: Improvising Music in a Complex Age*. London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.

Bruns, Gerald L. 1992. *Hermeneutics Ancient & Modern*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Carrette, Jeremy R. and Richard King. 2005. *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. London: Routledge.

Cassio, Francesca. 2011. "The Music of the Sikh Guru's Tradition in a Western Context." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 7, no. 3: 313-337.

----- 2013 (May 10-12). "Gurbani Sangit: Authenticity and Influences, A Study of the Sikh Gurus' tradition in relation to other genres of Indian music." University of Riverside's Third Sikh Studies Conference: *Dialogues with/in Sikh Studies: Texts, Practices and Performances*. Unpublished.

Cole, W. Owen. 1982. *The Guru in Sikhsim* by London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

Cust, Robert Needham. 1880. *Linguistic and Oriental Essays: Written from the Year 1846 to 1878*. London: Trubner & Co., pg 55. In Madra, Amandeep Singh and Parmjit Singh. 2011. *The Golden Temple of Amritsar, Reflections of the Past (1808-1959)*. London: Kashi House.

Damasio, Antonio. 2005 [1994]. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books.

D' Aquili, Eugene and Andrew B. Newberg. 1999. *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1997. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak trans. *Of Grammatology*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Durkheim, Emile. 1965. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Joseph Swain transl. New York and London: Free Press. 52. In Evans, Matthew T. Sep. 2003. "The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts." *Review of Religious Research. Religious Research Association, Inc.* 45 (1): 32-47.

Dusenbery, Vern A. 1992. "The Word as Guru: Sikh Scripture and the Translation Controversy." *History of Religions* 31 (4): 385-402.

-----2008. "Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs: Conflicting Assertions of Sikh Identity in North America." In *Sikhs at Large: Religion, Culture, and Politics in Global Perspectives*. 15-45, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Elsberg, Constance Waeber. 2010. "By an indirect route: Women in 3HO/Sikh dharma." In *Sikhism and women: History, texts and experience*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 299–328.

Evans, Matthew T. Sep. 2003. "The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts." *Review of Religious Research. Religious Research Association, Inc.* 45, no. 1: 32-47.

Farrell, Gerry. 1997. *Indian Music and the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1999. *Religion and Culture*. Jeremy R. Carrette ed. New York: Routledge.

Graham, William A. 1989. "Scripture as Spoken Word." Miriam Levering ed. *Rethinking Scripture: Essays From a Comparative Perspective*. NY: SUNY Press. 129-169.

Gifford, Paul. 2005. "Religious Authority: Scripture, tradition, charisma." *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. London: Routledge 379-391.

Ho, Meilu. 2006. *The Liturgical Music of the Pusti Marg of Indian: An Embryonic Form of the Classical Tradition*. Los Angeles: University of California. Unpublished dissertation.

-----2013. "Connecting Histories—Liturgical Songs as Classical Compositions in Hindustani music." *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 57, No. 2.

Jourdain, Robert. 1997. *Music, The Brain, And Ecstasy: How Music Captures Our Imagination*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Kanwal, Balbir Singh. 2010. *Punjab De Prasid Ragi Rababi*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar

Kaur, Inderjit N. 2011a. "Sikh Shabad Kirtan and Gurmat Sangit: What's in the Name?" *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol 18, No. 1-2: 251-278.

----- 2011b. "Musical Aesthetic in the Guru Granth and Implications For The Performance Practice Of Sikh Shabad Kirtan." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 7 (3), 297-312.

Kaur, Madanjit. 1983. *Golden Temple: Past and Present*. Dept. of Guru Nanak Studies. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press.

Kaur, Sukhdeep. April 2013. "Guru Granth Sahib: Copies to be printed in USA?" *The Sikh Review*. 61, no. 4: 45-46.

Kerby, Anthony Paul. 1991. *Narrative and the SELF*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

King, Richard. 2005. "Mysticism and Spirituality." *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells. NY: Routledge. 306-322.

Kramer, Lawrence. 2002. *Musical meaning: Towards a critical history*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Quoted in Bhogal, Balbinder Singh. 2011. "The Hermeneutics of Sikh Music (rag) and Word (shabad)." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 7 (3): 211-244.

Lallie, Harjinder Singh, Sandeep Kaur and Keerat Singh. 2012. "Emotion in Sikh Musicology." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 8:2, 171-198.

Leitner, Dr. Gottlieb Wilhelm. 1971 [1882]. *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab, Since Annexation and in 1882*. Reprint. Punjab: Patiala Language Department. in Madra, Amandeep Singh and Parmjit Singh. 2011. *The Golden Temple of Amritsar, Reflections of the Past (1808-1959)*. London: Kashi House.

Madra, Amandeep Singh and Parmjit Singh. 2011. *The Golden Temple of Amritsar, Reflections of the Past (1808-1959)*. London: Kashi House.

Mandair, Arvind, 2001. "Thinking Differently about Religion and History: Issues for Sikh Studies" in *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*. Shackle, Christopher, Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, and Gurharpal Singh eds. Routledge.

-----2005a, "The emergence of modern 'Sikh theology': Reassessing the passage of ideas from Trumpf to Bhai Vir Singh." *Bulletin of SOAS*. UK: School of Oriental and African Studies.

----- 2005b. "The Politics of Nonduality: Reassessing the Work of Transcendence in Modern Sikh Theology." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-----2009. *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

----- 2013 (May 10-12). "Sikh Philosophy as a Practice of Everyday Life". Paper given at 3rd Sikh Studies Conference at UC Riverside. *Dialogues within Sikh Studies: Texts, Practices and Performances*. Unpublished.

Macauliffe, M.A. 1963 [1909]. *The Sikh Religion. Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*. Volumes 1-4. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co. and Oxford University Press.

----- 1999 [1900]. "The Holy Writings of the Sikhs" Singh, Darshan ed. *Western Image of the Sikh Religion: A Source Book*. New Delhi: National Book Organisation.

Mansukhani, Gobind Singh. 1982. *Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtan*. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co.

Manuel, Peter. 1993. *Cassette Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marcus, Scott. Autumn 1992 - Winter 1993. "Recycling Indian Film-Songs: Popular Music as a Source of Melodies for North Indian Folk Musicians." *Asian Music*. University of Texas Press. 24 (1): 101-110.

Mauk, Fred. 1986. "Resurrection and Insurrection: Conflicting Metaphors for Musical Performance" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 45 (2): 139-145.

McMullen, Clarence Osmond. 1989. *Religious Beliefs and Practices of Sikhs in Rural Punjab*. New Delhi: Monahar Publications. Quoted in Myrvold, Kristina. 2007. *Inside the Guru's Gate: Ritual uses of texts among Sikhs in Varanasi*. Lund: Media-Tryck printers.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1978. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans Colin Smith. London: Humanities Press. 22. In Kerby, Anthony Paul. 1991. *Narrative and the SELF*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 22.

Nabha, Khan Singh. 1930. *Mahan Kosh*. New Delhi: National Book Shop.

Neuman, Daniel. 1980. *The Life of Music in North India*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Nijahawan, Michael. 2006. *Dhadi Darbar: Religion, Violence and the Performance of Sikh History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oberoi, Harjot. 1994. *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upanisads: Annotated Text and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ong, Walter J. 1982. *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London and New York: Routledge.

Paintal, Ajit Singh. 1971. *The Nature and Place of Music in Sikh Religion and its Affinity with Hindustani Classical Music*. Delhi University. Unpublished Dissertation.

Pemberton, John. 1994. *On the Subject of "Java"* Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.

Pincott, Frederic. 1999 [1885]. "Sikhism" *Western Image of the Sikh Religion: A Source Book*. New Darshand Singh ed. Delhi: National Book Organisation. 157-184.

Protopapas, Janice (Gurleen Kaur). 2011. "Kirtan Chaunki: Affect, Embodiment And Memory." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 7(3): 339-364.

Purewal, Navtej K. 2011. "Sikh/Muslim Bhai--Bhai? Towards a social history of the rababi tradition of shabad kirtan." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 7 (3): 365-382.

Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt. Winter 1993. "Muslim devotional: Popular religious music and Muslim identity under British, Indian and Pakistani hegemony." *Asian Music*. 24 (1).

-----Jan. 1999. "His Master's Voice? Exploring Qawwali and 'Gramophone Culture' in South Asia." *Popular Music*. Cambridge University Press. 18 (1): 63-98.

Raja, Deepak. 2005. *Hindustani Music: A Tradition in Transitions*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd.

Rowell, Lewis. 1992. *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ruti, Mari. 2006. *Reinventing the Soul: Posthumanist Theory and Psychic Life*. New York: Other Press.

S.S. Ramgarhia. 1903. *Guide to Darbar Sahib*. 28. In Madra, Amandeep Singh and Parmjit Singh. 2011. *The Golden Temple of Amritsar, Reflections of the Past (1808-1959)*. London: Kashi House. Photo #372.

Said, Edward. 1978. W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Sanyal, Ritwik and Richard Widdess. 2004. *dhrupad: Tradition and Performance in Indian Music*. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Saxena, Sushil Kumar. 1979. *The winged form: aesthetical essays on Hindustani rhythm*. New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi.

----- 2011. "The Mind and Art of Ustad A. Rahimuddin Khan Dagur" in *Dagur Vani: The Mind and Art of Allabande Rahimuddin Khan*. World Music Heritage Series, Vocal: dhrupad, Volume 1. Delhi: Anad Records Pvt. Ltd. 12-38.

Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, eds. 2005. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Guru Granth Sahib*. London and New York: Routledge.

Shankar, Vijay N and Harminder Kaur. 2005. *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*. Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, India.

Shelemay, Kay. 2008. "The Ethnomusicologist, Ethnographic Method, and Transmission of Tradition." *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008. Pp.141-157.

Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Delhi. 2006. *Sikh Rehat Maryada*. Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, New Delhi.

Sikh Sacred Music Society. 1967. *Sikh Sacred Music*. Sikh Sacred Music Society, New Delhi.

Singh, Gurtej. 2011. Ed. Dr. Anurupita Kaur. *Sikh Code in Guru Grant Sahib (A Court Testimony)*. Amritsar: Satvic Media Pvt. Ltd.

Singh, Bhai Baldeep. April 1999. "Sikh Kirtan Maryada." *The Sikh Spirit*. Issue 476. 66-68.

-----2000. "The Tradition and Discipline of Kirtan among the Sikhs." *Sikhsim-A Religion for the Third Millennium*. Punjabi University Lecture. Unpublished.

----- 2001. "Kirtan in Historical Perspectives." *Second Annual Ahluwalia Memorial Lecture in Sikhism*, Center for South Asia Studies. Berkeley University, California.

-----2011. "What is Kirtan?" *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 7(3): 245-295.

Singh, Bhai Avtar, and Bhai Gurcharan Singh. 1976 [1995/1996]. *Gurbani Sangeet: Pracheen Reet Ratnavali*, 2 Volumes. Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau.

Singh, Darshan ed. 1999. *Western Image of the Sikh Religion: A Source Book*. New Delhi: National Book Organisation.

Singh, Gurnam. 2000. *Gurmat Sangeet Praband Te Pasara*. Publications Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala.

----- 2001. *Sikh Musicology: Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Hymns of the Human Spirit*. Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi.

-----2008. *Sikh Sacred Music: Gurmat Sangeet*. Gurmat Prakashan, Patiala

----- "Sangeet Prabandh Of Gurbani" <http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>

----- "Raag Parbandh of Sri Guru Granth Sahib"  
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>

----- "Sikh Musicology" <http://www.scribd.com/doc/22539190/Articles-by-Dr-Gurnam-Singh>

Singh, Jodh. 1998. *Varan Bhai Gurdas: Text, Transliteration and Translation*, 2 Volumes. Patiala: Vision and Venture.

Singh, Manmohan transl. 1996. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee, Amritsar.

Singh, Pashaura. 2006. "Sikhism and Music." In: Beck, G (ed) *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions*. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 141-167.

-----2011. "Musical Chaunkis at the Darbar Sahib: History, Aesthetics, and Time." *Sikhism in Global Context*. Singh, Pashaura ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Singh, Ragi Bhai Gurcharan 'Kanwal'. 2008. *Kirtan Nirmolak Heera & The Art of Music*. New Delhi: Bhai Gurcharan Singh Ragi 'Kanwal'.



Singh, Trilochan. 2001. *Turban and The Sword of the Sikhs - Essence of Sikhism, Sikh symbols, and moral code of the Sikh's rahitnamas*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Amritsar: B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, 2001.

Slawek, Stephen M. 1994. "The Study of Performance Practice as a Research Method: A South Asian Example." *International Journal of Musicology*. 3: 9-22.

----- 2012 (Oct 26). "Fusion or Confusion?: Making or Breaking Tradition in Recent Experiments in the Instrumental Music of North India". *Lecture at the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance*. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Unpublished.

Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Subramanian, Lakshmi. 2008. *New Mansions for Music: Performance, Pedagogy and Criticism*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.

Tambiah, Stanley J. 1996. "A Performative Approach to Ritual." *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald Grimes. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Teignmouth, Lord. 1807. *The works of Sir William Jones: with the life of the author*. London: Printed for John Stockdale, Piccadilly; and John Walker, Paternoster-Row. 13 (4).

Thielemann, Selina. 2001. *Musical Traditions of Vaisnava Temples in Vraja: A comparative study of samaja and the dhrupada tradition of North Indian classical music: Volume I and II*. New Delhi: Sagar Printers and Publishers.

Trumpp, Ernest. 1999. "Sketch of the Religion of the Sikhs" *Western Image of the Sikh Religion: A Source Book*. Singh, Darshan ed. New Delhi: National Book Organisation.

van der Linden, Bob. 2008. "Sikh music and empire: The moral representation of self in music." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 4 (1): 1-15.

-----2011. "Sikh Sacred Music, Empire and World Music." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. 7 (3): 383-397.

----- 2012. "History Versus Tradition Again? A Response To Bhai Baldeep Singh." *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, 8 (2): 247-251.

van der Veer, Peter. 2001. *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.



Varela, Francisco J. 1999. *Ethical Know-how: Action, Wisdom and Cognition*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. In Bhogal, Balbinder Singh. December. 2012. "The Animal Sublime: Rethinking the Sikh Mystical Body." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Atlanta, Georgia: Oxford University Press. 80 (4): 856-908.

Wade, Bonnie C. 1976. "Prolegomenon to the Study of Song Texts." *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*. 8: 73-88.

-----1984. *Khayal: Creativity Within North India's Classical Music Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wallis, Roger. 2006. "Changing Structure of the Music Industry: Threats to and Opportunities for Creativity." *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*. Steven Brown & Ulrik Volgsten eds. New York: Berghahn Books. 287-311.

Weidman, Amanda J. 2006. *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Willard Captain N. Augustus. 1834. "A Treatise on the Music of Hindusthan." Cited in Bor, Joep 1988. "The Rise of Ethnomusicology: Sources on Indian Music 1780-c.1890." *Yearbook for Traditional Music*. 20: 51-73.

## WEBSITES

Akal Academy Baru Sahib, Akalacademy.org

Anad Foundation and Conservatory, <http://Anadconservatory.org/index.html>

Anad Foundation, <http://Anadfoundation.org>

Bhai Khan Singh Nabha, *Shabd Kosh*, [shabdkosh.com](http://shabdkosh.com)

Facebook Debates,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=5101240&id=651111173%EF%BB%BF>

Gurmat Sangeet Department, Punjabi University, Patiala, Gurmat Gyan Online,

[www.gurmatgyanonlinepup.com](http://www.gurmatgyanonlinepup.com)

Gurmat Sangeet Project, [gurmatsangeetproject.com](http://gurmatsangeetproject.com)

Gurmat Sangeet Project, <http://gurmatsangeet.blogspot.com/2012/03/sage-of-rakab-ganj.html>

Jawaddi Taksal, [www.vismaadnaad.org](http://www.vismaadnaad.org)

Oxford Dictionary, [www.OxfordDictionary.com](http://www.OxfordDictionary.com)

Sangeet Natak Akademi, <http://sangeetnatak.gov.in>

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), <http://sgpc.net>

Sikhnet, <http://www.sikhnet.com/espanola>

Sikhnet, <http://www.sikhnet.com/news/snatam-and-oprah>

Siri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), <http://www.sriganth.org>

*The Oprah Magazine* (April 2012) “Delicious Experiences: How Oprah Celebrated Her 58th Birthday”, <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/How-Oprah-Celebrated-Her-58th-Birthday>

The Sikh Encyclopedia, <http://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/arts-and-heritage/musicology-and-musicians/sundar-singh-ragi>

Tribune India, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060307/punjab1.htm>

Wim van der Meer, <http://wimvandermeer.wordpress.com/2012/11/23/dilip-chandra-vedi/>

World Sikh News, [www.WorldSikhNews.com](http://www.WorldSikhNews.com)

## REFERENCES

Singh, Principal Dyal. 2003 [1988, 1992, 1998]. *Gurmat Sangeet Sagar. Bagh Pehla* [First Volume]. New Delhi: Guru Nanak Vidya Bhandar Trust

-----2003 (Third printing) *Gurmat Sangeet Sagar. Bagh Dooga* [Second Volume]. New Delhi: Guru Nanak Vidya Bhandar Trust

-----2004 [1996, 1999]. *Gurmat Sangeet Sikhia*. New Delhi: Guru Nanak Vidya Bhandar Trust

-----2006 [1996]. *Tabla Mridang Sagar*. Amritsar: Dr. Shatr Singh Jeevan Singh

-----2010 [1984, 1991, 1995, 2001]. *Gurmat Sangeet Sagar: Asa Di Var te Shabd*. New Delhi: Guru Nanak Vidya Bhandar Trust

-----2011 [1993, 1999]. *Gurmat Sangeet Sagar. Bagh Teega* [Third Volume] New Delhi: Guru Nanak Vidya Bhandar Trust.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* 1824, 1827.

N.G. Barrier. 1978. “Trumpp and Macauliffe: Western students of Sikh history and religion” in *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, ed. Fauja Singh. New Delhi: Oriental. 155-185.

Singh, Professor Kartar, 2007. *Gurmat Sangeet Darpan Part 1*. Amritsar: Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

-----2008. *Guru Angad Dev Sangeet Darpan*. Amritsar: Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

-----2009. *Gurbani Sangeet Darpan*. Amritsar: Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

-----2009. *Gurmat Sangeet Darpan Part 2*. Amritsar: Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

-----2010. *Gurmat Sangeet Darpan Part 3*. Amritsar: Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

Vaudville, Charlotte. 1987. "Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity." in K. Shomer and W.H. McLeod, eds. *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 21-40.